



BEETZEN MANOR.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA LIBRARY



By W. HEIMBURG.

Digitized by Google

**LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA**



**PRESENTED BY
MRS. C. W. KENT**



Mary Stuart Smith
Presented by Publisher
The International News Co -

BEETZEN MANOR.

BEETZEN MANOR.

Tr. of "Haus Beetzen."

A Romance.

BY

W. HEIMBURG, *seud.*

Author of "A Maiden's Choice," "Gertrude's Marriage," "Two Daughters of One Race," etc.

Behrens, Bertha
"

TRANSLATED BY ELISE LATHROP.

THE TRADE SUPPLIED BY

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS COMPANY,

LONDON.

NEW YORK.

LEIPSIC.

GIFT

PT
2603
E34H32
1895
317833

Copyright, 1895,
BY
THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS COMPANY.

[All Rights Reserved.]

Y12XV18U
A18D9V 70

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—POOR DITSCHA.....	7
II.—A PLOT	28
III.—THE RESULT OF A DISAPPOINTMENT	37
IV.—THE DECISION	61
V.—SELF-SACRIFICE.....	76
VI.—CLANDESTINE MEETINGS.....	94
VII.—CHRISTMAS AT BEETZEN.....	107
VIII.—THE ELOPEMENT.....	130
IX.—SIX YEARS LATER.....	142
X.—A VISIT AND AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.....	172
XI.—UNCLE JO'S MISTAKE.....	191
XII.—IN THE TOILS.....	210
XIII.—ANOTHER CHRISTMAS EVE.....	234
XIV.—FAREWELL	248
XV.—GRETA'S ACCOUNT IS SETTLED.....	260
XVI.—BROTHER AND SISTER.....	268
XVII.—A LAST BLOW.....	308
XVIII.—TOO LATE	326

BEETZEN MANOR.

CHAPTER I.

POOR DITSCHA.

It is evening in the latter part of October, rainy, cold and windy, an evening that robs the trees of the park and adjoining forest of the last bit of the past summer's adornment, preserved with such difficulty. To-morrow, the crimson leaves of the wild grape and the yellow foliage of birch and beech will have been blown away, only the bare branches of the trees will reach out into the air; then it will not be long before November is here, that sad, deathly sad month, which flits over the earth in misty, gray, trailing garments, bowed and gloomy, followed by despondency and disease—oh, how mournful to sit here so alone in the great Beetzen Manor house, so utterly alone!

Poor Ditscha!

She leans her head back. Outside, the outlines of the trees have gradually disappeared in the mist and twilight, but what matters it? She knows the

view from the window of her room as well as the room itself, with its old-fashioned furniture; as the whole house; and as the occupants of this house, from uncle and aunts to the cook, the quarrelsome old coachman, and the asthmatic hunting dog, by the name of Cæsar.

Ah! everything is so familiar and well known here in the house, and so very monotonous, tiresome, and forlorn, one day just like another. The first thing in the morning, prayers, held by Aunt Anna; sometimes she reads selections from a religious book, at other times she extemporizes upon a Biblical subject, chosen by herself—this latter on occasions when some person in the house has failed in accordance with Aunt Anna's severe views.

In such cases Uncle draws his jovial face into strange folds. Ditscha avoids looking at him, for it always inclines her to laughter, and the matter is so serious, Ditscha so pious; she has the pure, reverential faith of eighteen years. Nor can she look at the others—Uncle's wife, Aunt Bertha, who, during prayers, thinks of her household affairs, or of her continual grief, and regularly gives nervous starts when Aunt Anna begins to sing in a high thin voice: "God bless us in our daily life;" nor at the cook, with her eyes piously turned heavenward.

Then the domestics take leave with a humble

“good-morning,” and the family goes to breakfast. Uncle reads the newspaper, Aunt Bertha her household accounts, and Aunt Anna, dipping her bread mechanically in her coffee, stares at a spot; no one says a word.

Then Ditscha must dust, for which Aunt Bertha has provided her with an old pair of her uncle’s chamois-skin gloves, that her hands may not suffer, since by the hands one recognizes a true lady. Then she practises, on the piano, heavy classical music. Aunt Anna, who teaches her, despises all salon trash. Finally she may go and bid good-day to Aunt Clementine, whose sick-room is in the tower, and who, about this time, has been placed by her nurse, Mrs. Hannab, in her invalid chair, which stands day in and day out by the window affording the widest view of all in the manor, and which the poor cripple so loves, poor crippled, gentle Aunt Clementine.

Scarcely has Ditscha kissed her hand and inquired after her health, when she must help Aunt Anna to sew all kinds of articles of clothing for the missionary society; then comes dinner, and after dinner the aunts sleep, so Ditscha may do what she will. Formerly she occupied her time with reading, that is to say she secretly crept into the library, which twenty years before had been well stocked, but since then, since the great misfortune, had not been enriched by a single book.

Ditscha passed her happiest hours in the deserted, quiet room, smelling of dust and mould, and where she could read only by laying the book on a window ledge near a crack in the tightly closed blinds which admitted a little daylight. But this did not disturb her; she read as a thirsty one drinks, books of travel, histories, sentimental romances, memoirs, everything, everything,—until one day she finds the door locked, and the next morning at prayers Aunt Anna remarks that the reading of worldly books is poison to the minds of young girls. Then Ditscha knows who has debarred her from her only diversion, so now she passes her free time in doing nothing; in summer out under the trees of the park, where she lies for hours, staring at a half-destroyed nymph in rococo style, or in winter on her lounge, where instead of the nymph she studies the carved ceiling of her room.

What else can she do? To be sure she does one thing more thoroughly, she longs—for what? For life, laughter, work, fresh, invigorating air, such as youth needs, and for some one to love her, prefer her, pet her a little, to whom she may say all that comes into her lonely young mind. She does not know herself how deep this longing is, and calls herself ungrateful when tears suddenly fill her eyes as now. Yes, she is ungrateful. She fares so well as it is. She will go at once to five o'clock

tea, and help Aunt Anna knit missionary stockings, or play Uncle his favorite piece, the only worldly one allowed by Aunt Anna, a *pot pourri* of various Prussian marches and patriotic songs. It begins with the famous: "*So leben wir, so leben wir*," and ends with: "*Heil dir im Sieger kranz*." And she may listen to the editorial in the newspaper; if the pastor and the head forester come in for a game of whist, she may talk to the wives of these two gentlemen and her aunts, or rather, hear them talk, and then she will learn of everything that is happening for ten miles around. In the evening, at supper, Uncle revives a few familiar old anecdotes, at which Aunt Bertha smiles, and Aunt Anna rolls her eyes; then she may fill Uncle's pipe, bring a paper lighter, and pour out the hot water and rum of which Uncle drinks several glasses each evening. At the third glass Aunt Anna usually disappears, for then he becomes critical. Greatly as he dreads his stern sister in the mornings at prayers, after swallowing two glasses of grog he is capable of defying her. After her departure he laughs and rubs his hands for pure happiness and comfort, his manner becomes more careless, and he says to Ditscha: "Is there any more hot water there?"

Of course; there is always hot water there. And she pours him out a fourth glass, after which Aunt Bertha sends her away; for when Ditscha

hands him the fourth glass he always pats her on the cheek, and calls her a "deuced pretty witch!" when Aunt Bertha calls loudly: "Good-night, Ditscha, sweet dreams, and do not oversleep." Then she goes away to bed.

Thus the day is over, and to-morrow is just the same, and day after to-morrow again, as it has been now for three years, since her governess was dismissed, and she was confirmed by Pastor Besser, and as it will continue to be—good heavens, for how long still?

She stretches her slender body, which reminds one of a young birch, and yawns as she quickly wipes away the last tears. It is really wrong of papa to exile her thus, he, in his position. It was cruel in God to take her mother from her so early that she could not grow up in her father's house, and wrong to put the unfortunate, unnecessary idea into her father's head of marrying again, now, when she could have kept house for him. He married a young wife, not much older than Ditscha, and she—of course papa did not want her then; and Aunt Bertha, who had no children, at once offered to keep her here as her adopted daughter—of course! A mother, without the slightest idea of what Ditscha's young nature needed, a woman who talks only of housekeeping matters, of economy, and of the great misfortune of her life, and does not even notice that Ditscha is pale, and her eyes red.

And Uncle? He does not understand her in the least. Early to-day she had begged him to allow her to found a school for little children in the village. She would teach them and look after them, would so love them, the blond blue-eyed little creatures, who crawl about unnoticed in the houses while their mothers are at work; she was fairly feverish in her eagerness when she told her uncle her wish. "Uncle, ah please, please, I would so enjoy it. I should so like to be of some use in the world!"

And what had he replied? He asked her if she were not quite in her senses? How had she gotten such an idea into her head, she who had no need of it? If such an institution as a day nursery for children were needed—formerly no one had heard of such things—well, then he would not refuse his assistance, most assuredly, but in that case a suitable person should be placed at the head of it. She, Ditscha, would surely not try to take the place of some poor being who was destined to earn her own living—in short; "No!" And once again; "No!"

"Ditscha!" now rang through the corridor; "Ditscha—a—a!"

If they would only give up the silly name. But of course she will remain "Ditscha" for all time. "Ditscha," as her Polish nurse had named her, and which is really no name, but merely means

"child." She stands still and frowns; her name is Sophie—Sophie and not—

"Ditscha—a—a!" rings out again very decidedly—that is Aunt Anna!

She starts, nervously passes her hand over her dark hair, and hurries down the broad staircase, upon which the last daylight falls through the old stained-glass panes of the high hall window.

"Ah, please excu—" She gets no further. She pauses, startled and embarrassed, for there in the lamplight sits—O most unusual sight—a stranger at the coffee-table, between Uncle and Aunt, and like the others, turns his head toward her, while he springs up and bows.

"Mr. von Perthien, my niece, Sophie von Kronen! The daughter of my younger brother, you know. Colonel of dragoons, in Mühlen," says her uncle.

Ditscha bows her lovely pale face, and now she sits not daring to look up. He is the first young man whom she has met thus, this Mr. von Perthien.

"Mr. von Perthien has entered as volunteer, on the Royal agricultural domains at Uechte, with Agricultural Commissioner Calwarwisch, so of course would not fail to call upon his papa's old friend."

On the whole, conversation was very monosyllabic, for Mr. von Perthien could not become in-

terested in the missionary affairs, which theme Aunt Anna had started, and Uncle Joachim is obliged to speak of farming, rape and beet planting, of forestry and the hunting of this region, finally telling "little" Perthien that he himself likes to shoot, a solitary deer hunt is the only remaining pleasure he has in the world. And then he nods at his wife, who looks very pale and depressed.

"There was once a young man staying with Commissioner Calwarwisch," she begins, for the sake of saying something.

"Who wished to deprive me of that occupation," completes Uncle.

"Why, Joachim!" interrupts Aunt Anna, visibly shocked. "But that would be poaching!"

"About that!"

"Doubtless!" says Mr. von Perthien gravely.

Aunt Bertha invites the guest, who makes no sign of leaving, to remain to supper. He accepts with a low bow, and a glance at Ditscha. After supper she must play. Uncle Joachim had indeed made an attempt at conversation by asking if the estate of Mr. von Perthien was leased, but then, without awaiting an answer, mechanically reached out his hand for the newspaper, and Aunt was absorbed in the thought that her only, deeply-mourned son might now be just such a fine young man if only—ah God!

Mr. von Perthien went to the piano and watched the young girl as she played a Beethoven sonata with much feeling. "Do you like such grave music?" he asked as she concluded.

She nodded,—she knew no other.

"Do you like to dance?"

"Sophie never dances," cries Aunt Anna sternly from the sofa corner.

"Why not?"

"Eh! With whom could she dance?" interrupts Uncle Joachim—he is still drinking his first glass—"the balls in Büchow are not enticing, a few students, a couple of attorneys, a million girls and besides, you know,—we, my wife and I—eh, dear?"

"Happiness is not to be found there!" Aunt Anna quickly interrupts him.

Aunt Bertha looks at her husband, and a grave nod confirms his opinion. "Yes, and besides we—we two——"

He takes a long, noisy draught. "Hey, Ditscha," he then says, "have you any more hot water?"

She comes with the shining little kettle. Aunt Anna rises with dignity at this signal, and with a "Good-night, dears. Good-evening, Mr. von Perthien!" leaves the room with the mien of a tragedy queen making an imposing exit. Mr. von Perthien seats himself at the piano and begins to play a waltz: Strauss's "Beautiful Blue Danube."

Ditscha stands behind her uncle's chair and listens to the seductive tones with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. What alluring rhythms! How he plays!

The handsome, bold-faced fellow seems to dance as he plays, and now he suddenly raises his eyes and looks at her. A glance expressing so much, gay enjoyment of life and pity—pity for her, poor girl—where is your youth?

She feels that she blushes, and lowers her eyes; a feeling of anger overcomes her. What does he know of her and her life?

Aunt Bertha has dropped her knitting and stares into space; with furrowed brow, Uncle drums on the table, his face twitches as he looks at Ditscha.

"Hey, Ditscha, do your feet twitch?" he asks. "Would you like to dance once, eh? Well, mother, try your hand for once, and play a schot-tische for them."

But instead of answering, Aunt Bertha lays her knitting on the table, and hurries to the door, convulsively searching for her handkerchief as she goes.

Uncle Joachim looks after her, nods a few times, then rises, and says with a grim smile:

"Well then, I will see if I can manage a schot-tische. Now, sir, engage your partner."

And he seats himself at the piano; his hard, stiff fingers hit the keys like wooden hammers,

while he whistles simultaneously, with a strange, grave expression, the melody of the dance.

But Ditscha does not know how it happens that, encircled by the young man's arm, she whirls around the room, breathless, smiling, to the right, to the left, forward, backward—nor does she notice the door open, and a little, round, fat woman enter and pause as though petrified, a bottle of Rhine wine under one arm, and a tray of plates, glasses, fruit and cake in both hands.

Ditscha and her partner pause just then, the pianist cries "Bravo!" and seeing the maid, rises, rushes up to her and takes the bottle from her.

"Here, you! Rhine wine must be kept cool. Do you call it keeping cool to press it to your heart, goose?" And his laughter fills the whole room.

The old woman makes no reply. She sets the tray on the table with an unfathomable look, and leaves the room.

Then Aunt Bertha comes in again; her eyelids are red as though from weeping. At sight of her Uncle Joachim's face twitches again. He goes to the piano and closes the lid with a bang. "Enough of that!" says he, and draws the young man toward the table. Ditscha sits beside her aunt, still heated from dancing.

Poor little Ditscha! It is the first and last time in her life that she has danced.

The wine flows into the glasses and the host drinks with his guest, to his father, to past youth, but conversation does not become fluent. Almost an uncanny sensation overcomes Mr. von Perthien among these strange people who waver between laughter and tears. The girl sits there like a shy bird.

"Ditschen," says the old man, "have you any more hot water?" He has scorned Rhine wine and drunk his grog after a time.

Ditscha pours out his fourth glass. Aunt Bertha looks on calmly, and only says: "Ditscha!"

She understands, comes over and kisses the old lady's hand for a good-night. Uncle gives her a resounding smack on the forehead, and cries: "See, Bertha, how becoming red cheeks are to the witch."

Ditscha flushes more deeply, bows to Mr. von Perthien, and in the next moment has left the room.

After her departure the room seems to have become more gloomy to the young man. The two before him seem to have forgotten how to speak. Finally he rises and thanks them for their cordial reception of him. Neither his host nor hostess say a word of his coming again. But he *will* come again. Kissing his hostess' hand he asks if he may be permitted to pay his respects at some future time.

Aunt Bertha makes no reply.

His host coughs.

"You see, my dear Perthien, we are old people, there is no society here, h'm—if we are not too tiresome—we will certainly be pleased—at some other time—but do not promise yourself too much of our house, and greet your father for me. Shall you write how you found me? Tell him old, lonely, very lonely, and here, here especially." He laid his hand on his heart. "Eh, Bertha, here."

Then he drinks and coughs, wipes his lips under his mustache, and says nothing more. Aunt Bertha too, merely bows silently, and does not even notice the young man's stammered: "In these rooms I felt as though I were at home."

Meanwhile Hannah stands in the tower room before her mistress, Clementine. She is quite crimson with anger, and talks uninterruptedly in her queer mixture of high and low German, while the spirituelle, delicate, suffering face of the invalid wears a weary smile.

"As Frederick was not at hand, Miss, and because I was going upstairs, I took the cake and wine up into the sitting-room just to be obliging, but I wish I hadn't, for one only gets vexed and annoyed for one's trouble. There our Miss Ditscha was hopping around the room with a strange young man as though she had gone mad, and the

master sitting there playing and whistling. It's a sin and a shame the way the child is treated here. Miss Anna torments her to death with her missionary business, and the master makes unsuitable remarks in her presence—it does not hurt one of our like, but such a child it will spoil. And the mistress hears and sees nothing of it all, because her head is always full of the past. And now as ill-luck would have it, such a young greyhound—for he is one; I know young men, Miss, he is a greyhound, I saw it by the way he stared at Miss Sophie—he comes into the house, and is treated to the best Rhine wine, which is usually only brought out on birthdays, what will he think? He will be bold and talk nonsense to our young lady, and she will believe it, yes, indeed. I tell you she will believe it, for she is bored to death because, more's the pity, she does not know herself what her young life ought to be.”

“Hannah, Hannah!” admonished Miss Clementine, the eldest of the four brothers and sisters von Kronen.

“I only say too plainly what I mean, Miss!”

“Hannah, you must break yourself of criticising, it is not suitable to you.”

“What? I must give up criticising? No, that I will not, for it is my duty. And you see it too, Miss, and I saw it. Is this a life for such a young thing? No young society and pleasure?

When one's veins are full of life, and one's heart of longing to be something, to do something, to be of some use in the world, to put her in a glass case, shut her up as if she were in a convent, knitting missionary stockings and seeing the roses bloom only from a distance! Is it right? We have learned to breathe in the old dust, but such a child of eighteen——"

"Calm yourself, Hannah. Neither you nor I can do anything to alter matters, and God alone knows how Ditscha's life will be."

During her harangue, Hannah had been moving about and had gone into the adjoining bed-room.

"Yes, yes," she murmured. "Miss Clementine is right again. 'We two can do nothing to alter matters.'" But she did not yield the point outwardly, but called back: "Your brother need not have gone courting again, Miss Clementine, or he might have picked out an older woman, more suited to him; then Miss Sophie could have gone to him. But when the step-mother is herself a child! Suppose there should be any babies now, boys for instance? Then Miss Ditscha would have to make the best of it, and give up all hope of inheriting Beetzen, and she can stay here like Miss Clementine and Miss Anna, with her brother."

"And do we not fare well?" asked the invalid gently, while the look of pain on her face deepened.

"Hannah, Hannah, say no more this evening, for you are as overflowing with discontent as the eave troughs outside with rain."

"Not on my own account," grumbled the fat little woman, coming back into the room; then she raised her mistress and carried her carefully into the bed-room. "Dear me, Miss Tina," said she tenderly, "you must get a little heavier, you are as light as feathers. To-day I got some fine eggs from the farmer, and a pair of young chickens; you must eat, you must eat, Miss, for if anything should happen to you I do not know what would become of Miss Ditscha." And a tear fell on the invalid's hand.

"Foolish Hannah," said she softly and cheerfully. "I have no idea of dying; as long as you are with me it is impossible, for you would not let Death come near me."

"Ah, Miss, I would die with you, for you are the sunlight in this house for Miss Ditscha and me. In comparison, Miss Anna and all her charitable works are mere moonlight, and to-morrow, Miss, keep Miss Ditscha with you and talk to her a while, for the greyhound must have turned her head, eh?"

And Miss Clementine smiled and promised. She lay awake a long time thinking of Ditscha—Hannah was so right—poor Ditscha! What would become of the child with her deeply pas-

sionate nature? Various little incidents in the girl's life came to her mind, all betokening a striving after the ideal, unusual self-sacrifice, the effort to love with her whole warm, overflowing heart, the passionate longing to be loved in return.

As a little child of five she came in from the village one day, dusty, dishevelled, without a hat, her hair tangled, while tears had left streaks on her flushed cheeks. In her arms she clasped a small, abused dog, which she then put to bed in her doll carriage, petting and feeding it, and imploring it not to die, ah, please not to die. She was so beside herself that they had to separate her forcibly from the whining animal that they might take it away and kill it. She wrung her hands and screamed for hours, without shedding a tear. A doctor was sent for, a doll given her; finally they told her the dog was dead. Then she ceased screaming.

"Does anything hurt him now?"

"No, no, Ditscha."

"He surely would have loved me if he had gotten well," said she, beginning to scream again.

One day—she was then fifteen—she amazed the household by the strange companions she brought home, a ragged woman with a child in her arms, a vagabond of the worst sort. Ditscha briefly and emphatically demanded shelter for them, as the

child had diphtheria. There was great excitement. Uncle Jo raged and swore. Aunt Anna dragged her to the window and gazed down her throat, and Aunt Bertha ordered the woman to the village hospital, an old stone building built by an ancestor of the family and still liberally supported by them.

But Ditscha had other views; she trembled and turned pale. "That is not Christian!" she cried, "if you are afraid she may come in my room. I will take care of the child."

"No, for aside from everything else the disease is contagious," cried Uncle Jo.

"Suppose everybody thought thus!" said she, with flashing eyes. But she was powerless, and the woman went to the hospital. Aunt Bertha, before Ditscha's eyes, packed a basket of food and clothing—it did not soften her. In the evening they missed her; she was looked for and found in the hospital, where she watched the child while the mother went to the city apothecary. Hannah's efforts to take the young girl away by force were vain: she had promised to stay with the child until the mother returned. There was nothing for Hannah to do but wait. The woman never returned; she knew the child was in good hands, and was glad to be rid of her burden.

Only at the doctor's direct command did Ditscha leave the child, after she had been promised

that if it recovered Uncle Joachim would care for it, and she might bring it up.

Of course the little thing died, and Ditscha's despair was great. Again her grief was summed up in the cry: "It would surely have loved me a little!"

Poor Ditscha! She feels what she lacks, the possession of a whole heart. No one in this afflicted family is any longer capable of giving all, and a nature such as Ditscha's needs bright, warm sunshine, not pale, cold rays.

"Poor Ditscha!" whispered Clementine, "what will become of you?"

If she could only do more, but how much longer will she live? She will surely help the child, but she lacks courage to keep the young girl in the quiet sick-room, while her eyes wander so longingly and inquiringly toward the window. Clementine is so modest, she plays the most insignificant rôle in the household—the strange, original household of Beetzen. She lacks strength to initiate Ditscha into the rich realm of her thoughts and interests; she tried, but was exhausted after the first effort to interest Ditscha in her favorite occupation. The invalid lives and has her being in the wonders of creation, and above all the starry heavens fascinate her. In her lonely life of renunciation she derives from the infinite the comfort she needs: she learns to feel, in compari-

son with it, as an atom, a nothing, a mere speck in creation, a nothing and yet a something, a something that can admire and adore, that thankfully and with awe seeks to grasp the marvels disclosed by science, a science which she studies with all her frail strength.

On the little balcony before her sitting-room window is an excellent telescope, on her table lie reports of the latest discoveries, and Caroline Herschel's portrait hangs on the wall among huge charts of the heavens.

But what does an eighteen-year-old girl care for the cold stars on high? Ditscha listened patiently to what Aunt Clementine told her of Mars, she obediently examined the beautiful planet through the glass, but her aunt was forced to admit to herself that the planet called earth, with its as yet unfamiliar wonders, was far more interesting to the girl than the red planet yonder.

Yes, yes, Clementine has not forgotten the time when such was the case with her also. Poor Ditscha, what will your future be?

"O God, Thou who guidest the stars, take pity on this young, longing heart, and lead it into the right paths!" prays the invalid.

CHAPTER II.

A PLOT.

DITSCHA does not sleep this night.

Hans von Perthien rides thoughtfully along the dark road. Mr. von Kronen had sent a groom with him as far as the bridge, so that his guest, wholly unfamiliar with the country, might at least reach the high-road without losing his way. Having arrived thus far in safety, he sees lights shining in the distance, and learns that there lies the town which he must pass quite closely to reach Uechte: he resolves, since it is now late, to stop at the tavern for a drink. He gives the man a cigar, rides to the town, and after inquiring the way, goes directly to the inn frequented by the young fellows of these parts. He must learn further particulars of the von Kronens; Ditscha's pretty, mournful face pleased him, but of course, if there is no money to back it, he must be on his guard. He must marry money, or else he cannot keep his estate. His father is always making fresh inroads upon it to satisfy old ones. Hard times are in store for the future heir, with private debts and all kinds of expensive passions: these

accursed debts left behind him in Halle really embitter his life.

In the smoky, low room of the inn, with the petroleum lamps hanging from the ceiling, sit a number of men, most of them respectable beer-drinkers, as he says to himself. In the next room a game of billiards is being played. The very blond waitress with freckled face and dazzling white apron, who brings beer to his solitary table, tells him that the gentlemen in there are from the court, and a couple of volunteers from Uechte.

"Reeden and Timpe," he thinks, and surely enough, as he enters, he sees them watching the game.

"Perthien—so late?" they ask.

"From Beetzen," he replies, allowing them to introduce him to the others, and then repeating: "From Beetzen."

"Refused admittance, of course?" says one.
"Very sorry—left a card?"

"Not at all," he says lazily.

"Admitted to the halls of Beetzen?" cry the two together in amazement.

"Certainly!"

"Then you must possess a magic word to enable you to cross this threshold." "How did you succeed in taming the old bear in his den?" "How is the fair Sophie?" are questions asked almost in a breath.

"I had no difficulty; my father and Kronen are old friends, that is all." He does not notice the question about Ditscha.

"A most peculiar fellow, Joachim von Kronen," says one.

"Absurdly proud! One who is not descended from a Montmorenci does not exist for him," says another.

"Used to be a nice old fellow, Wild Jo."

"Oh yes, when he has enough drink."

"He has grown so peculiar since the boy's death," says an elderly professor. "Only fancy, gentlemen, his only son and heir was drowned on Christmas eve—it was terrible."

"Were you living here then?" some one asks.

"Yes," he replies simply. "I was tutor at Beetzen Manor at that time. It is no secret; do you care to hear it, Mr. von Perthien?"

The two men seat themselves at some distance from the players, in a window recess; the waitress brings them fresh foaming beer, and the blond-bearded little Dr. Nietzgen relates as follows:

"I suppose that you are acquainted with the family affairs of the von Kronens?"

"Not at all," replies the young man. "My father knew Mr. von Kronen about thirty years ago. At that time the ——— dragoons were stationed here in Büchow, and the two served their year together.

My father was often at Beetzen, and still speaks of the house as magnificent for those days, and I remember—at that time I was a boy of eight—how he one day remarked that he had received notice of the engagement of Wild Jo.”

“Quite right, ‘Wild Jo’ he was always called,” laughed the doctor.

“Later, the friendship of the two men slumbered,” continued von Perthien, “and only when my father recommended me to take a practical course at Uechte did he remember that Beetzen was near by, and expressed a wish that I call upon Mr. von Kronen.”

“Well, you can soon be informed of the affairs,” said Nietzgen. “The *fiancée*, and soon after the wife, of von Kronen was a Miss von Zweifelden, a good, simple creature, quite pretty, an excellent housekeeper, and wealthy, but above all things of a good, old, noble family. After two years they had a son. Great rejoicing, of course! Wild Jo’s two sisters, Miss Anna and Miss Clementine, who have remained unmarried, as well as the younger brother, the father of the young girl now living at Beetzen—at that time he was ensign—stood god-parents, and after the advent of the son and heir, Wild Jo became quite a tame Jo. The young wife, who during the first years of her marriage had many grounds for complaint of her husband, could complain no longer. He developed

all the virtues of a good father of a family, and Beetzen was a small Paradise, so to speak.

“When the boy, who was called ‘Achim’ to distinguish him from his father, was ten years old, I entered the family. That was the golden time of my life, Mr. von Perthien, for you can imagine nothing more comfortable than life in the old manor house. Wild Jo always happy and content, his wife ever thoughtful of the comfort of those about her, his sisters not remarkably learned but clever, especially the elder, Clementine, of whom more later. A charming household, simple, healthy: harvest-festivals, summer picnics, little New Year’s jokes, really it was delightful. At that time he drank no grog. Well, matters went on so until the boy was sixteen. Not an unusually gifted child, but simple like all of them, healthy, and with a thirst for information about everything pertaining to his future calling. Slender as a birch, with curly brown hair, and extravagantly fond of all sports. He sat his horse superbly! His father’s radiant face when they rode together was indescribable. Then came the fatal Christmas eve. The house was full of company, among others the brother with his newly wedded wife—he was captain then—several cousins on leave, their sisters and others. The boy was to receive a new English horse for a present, and they had sent him away that he might not see it when it

was brought into the stable: it was here in the stable of Grundmann the dealer, and had come directly from England.

"I do not know how it happened that I did not accompany him, probably Mrs. von Kronen had asked me to assist in her preparations; I only remember that all the house was in a state of festivity, that it snowed and froze, that it smelled of cake everywhere, and the ladies and gentlemen did not know what to do to pass the time until the presentation of gifts, and finally Miss Clementine proposed a walk across the meadow to the river. From my window I saw them start, Miss Clementine ahead. She was a pretty, stately woman then, and the especial idol of the boy. They said that she had had an unhappy love affair, had fallen in love, when a girl, with a Berlin astronomical professor, whom she had met at some watering-place, and—well, a Kronen and a professor! Of course Wild Jo would never have consented, and so—as they said—she gave him up, and wearied no one with her grief.

"So then, I saw them start, and Miss Clementine called up to me that she would look for Achim."

The little man paused for a moment, drew a deep breath, drank, fumbled at his cravat as though it were too tight, then continued hoarsely:

"And they found him. He was skating on the

river, and Miss Clementine ventured out on the ice to admire her nephew from near-by. He called something to her that she did not understand, and she went on, fancying he had encouraged her to advance. Then she felt the ice tremble beneath her feet, felt it break, and that she was sinking into the water. She screamed and lost consciousness, and when she came to herself—she found herself saved, but the boy—the boy was under the ice—dead!

“I have passed through much, Mr. von Perthien, but such a time—no, no, I can say no more about it. If I live to be a hundred I will never forget the mad rage of Kronen, his terrible laugh, and the reaction, which made him almost an idiot—let me be silent about the wife.

“Therefore the sun no longer shines in Beetzen, therefore is there no entertaining, and for this reason the pretty girl pines away her youth there. For this reason is the wife only a spirit of the past, the husband so grim, this is the cause of the grog—so much grog; no star shines upon the house, the bailiff does what he will—it is all the same to Jo von Kronen, his heir is dead——”

“And the unfortunate sister?” asks Perthien.

“Paralyzed since that day, by the coldness of the water or the terrible shock, I know not which.”

“And how comes the young girl at Beetzen?”

“Her mother died at her birth, and the father

brought the child to Mrs. Bertha thinking to alleviate her grief thus. She took her, provided her with food and clothing, knowing she is a von Kronen, and the probable heiress of everything, but—" he shrugged his shoulders—"the sun is lacking, the sun! And when I see the girl with her Aunt Anna or Bertha, with her pale face and sad questioning eyes—good heavens! My girls are very poor, but they can laugh and enjoy themselves."

Mr. von Perthien has become thoughtful. Suppose he could rescue the enchanted princess!

"I will go there often," says he .

"Do not trouble yourself," says the other, rising. "No one will be at home for you the second time."

"Oho!" says Perthien, with all the self-confidence of twenty-four years.

"Good luck then, sir!"

"Thank you, doctor."

While Hans von Perthien rides home he makes a plan. Both Beetzen and Ditscha must be conquered—both! One alone would be of no use to him. And then for once his father will be satisfied; he has no cause to be thankful to him, Hans, as yet, and so will the usurers in Halle. Nor shall Ditscha regret it; he will take her to every possible dance, for the girl is simply bored to death here. Aunt Bertha and Wild Jo shall find him a son-in-law quite *comme il faut*, and the

dreadful aunt, with her missionary stockings, can be suppressed after a while.

He arrives at Uechte with his two companions, very tired, and this prevents him from further dwelling upon his plan of campaign to-day, but conquer he will and must.

CHAPTER III.

THE RESULT OF A DISAPPOINTMENT.

WHEN Hans von Perthien calls again at Beetzen he is unlucky. At Christmas time, when the misfortune befell them, sadness broods year in and year out over Beetzen. He is not received. Mrs. von Kronen had declared that it was beyond her strength to see such a handsome, slender young fellow in her house, for their lost son would have been just so old, and Joachim von Kronen had said she should have her way, and was now in a fearful mood, a mood which even Aunt Anna, with her morning prayers, could not conquer, although she spoke much of humility and the duty of bearing one's cross patiently.

Aunt Anna, too, has cause to be dissatisfied with Ditscha. After that visit the young girl went around for several days with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, but from the moment when, in her presence, Frederick was told that if visitors called—the head forester and pastor of course excepted—no one was at home, color and happiness disappeared again from the pretty face. She

shivered, sat still, did indeed everything she had to do, but with evident unwillingness.

Hannah found this quite a matter of course, "for Miss Clementine, it is this way: if one is never to hear and see, the cotton must not be taken from the ears, or the bandage from the eyes for one moment, only to put them back again, for then it is pure cruelty. And even if what Miss Ditscha has seen and heard is of the most inferior quality, she surely thinks it delightful, because she has never had anything to compare it with, so she may easily take a wooden apple for a pippin."

While she made these wise remarks Hannah was setting the table, beside which her mistress sat in her invalid chair near the window. It is a cosy, pretty room, this semicircular tower room with its furniture dating back to the beginning of the century. The red firelight is reflected in the little silver kettle, under which burns a spirit lamp. Although only three o'clock in the afternoon it is already nearly dark; the sky is overcast heavily, and the leafless branches of the trees present a mournful sight. Fortunately, the evergreens on the other side of the lawn hide the graveyard from view, or it would have been an even more doleful aspect; the dark forest which shuts off the distance, the spires of Büchow, usually visible, and the old castle of Uechte, to-day are veiled in the mist and fog.

Before the invalid stand a couple of bright pink roses the last of the year. As long as there are roses, Joachim von Kronen daily sends some to his unfortunate sister; he never fails in attention, everything that can please her is done. The most expensive astronomical works, the softest rugs, the most complicated American invalid chair, everything, everything he buys her, but—he will not see her. Only once a year, on New Year's morning, he comes into her room, rough, noisy, abrupt: "Well, how are you? Happy New Year!—hope you are feeling better—do you want anything?" He looks past her as he speaks, and she strokes his hand, while her eyes rest full of sorrow and pity on his twitching face.

"Nothing, Joachim, I want nothing. I thank you heartily for all you do for me."

Then he goes again, coughing, blowing his nose, and for the rest of the day he is ill and Miss Clementine also.

Now she turns her head: "Did you tell Miss Sophie, Hannah, that I expect her about three o'clock?"

"Yes, Miss, and here she is," was the answer.

Ditscha appears between the portières.

"I am late, dear Aunt Tina," she says in excuse. "I fell asleep on my sofa, and then had to finish the letter to papa."

"What has tired you so, little girl?" asks Aunt Tina, stroking the magnificent brown hair.

"Oh, I do not know, Auntie, I am always tired," she replies apathetically, and seats herself in one of the deep arm-chairs.

"What have you been doing all day?"

"Nothing especial. Practised, dusted—Aunt Anna is making white frocks for India, and I sewed on them; then Aunt Bertha is potting game for the winter, and asked me to come in the kitchen to taste and see if there were enough juniper berries in, and because I said 'yes,' she said: 'Nonsense!' so Rieka must put in a few more. And at dinner, Uncle Jo quarrelled with Aunt Anna over missionary matters, and said she ought first to look after our village children, who were worse than savages. Then I meant to go to walk, but papa's letter came, and one from Lieschen Lindenberg—" now her lips quivered as though with suppressed weeping.

"And what does your papa write?"

"He is well," says Ditscha, swallowing her tears, "he was in Berlin, but—only think—" she swallows again—"he writes that I cannot come for Christmas this year. Why not? Aunt Bertha will tell me in due time."

An expression of deepest woe lay on Ditscha's face as she said this.

"Ah well, postponed is not given up, child," said the old lady consolingly.

"Papa wrote that too."

"And your friend Lieschen, what does she write?"

The sad face brightens. "Only fancy, aunt," she asks me not to speak of it, but I can tell you, you are so silent—she is secretly engaged. The whole letter is written dreadfully and almost blotted out with tears, and at the end she writes: 'Excuse the writing, but Fritz is standing behind me and kissing me.' Then a blot, and in a man's handwriting: 'Greeting to his dear Lieschen's friend from your happy (happy three times underlined)—Fritz Hennecke.'"

"Only think," says Hannah in surprise, "and she so young! Much too young is Miss Liesing!"

"And fancy, aunt," continues Ditscha, "he fell in love with her because she paints so beautifully, Lieschen writes. He is an artist too. It must be delightful to have a talent, Aunt Tina," she adds softly, "I have none at all, none at all."

"Nonsense, Miss Ditscha," cries Hannah, who has just filled the coffee-cups and poured out cream for her mistress. "You can have that too if you want. One can acquire talents. Old Kurzlob, who is a clerk with the councillor in Büchow, his eldest boy is an artist too, and there was even something in the paper about his picture,

that he exhibited in Berlin, and I remember how Kurzlob used to say to me: 'It is so unfortunate. Our Otto smears everything. The chairs and tables and Heaven knows what not.' He only made up his mind to that," says she, "and no whipping helped. You see, Miss, you should make up your mind to acquire some talent just for your own pleasure, for you need not learn to sell your work, since you have money to live on."

Ditscha smiled, but her eyes were full of tears.

She nods to Hannah, who leaves the room with a "Just try it!" and stirs her coffee.

"Would you read aloud a few pages to me, Ditscha?" says Aunt Clementine to divert her thoughts.

"Of course, aunt? The new continuation of that story?"

"Oh no—I should like—would you not like to read some of the classics with me? I have not read them for a long time, and you scarcely know them, do you?"

"Only from my literature lessons, Aunt Tina; the library is still always locked, as you know."

"But you would enjoy it? For instance—ah, let us select at haphazard, go to the bookcase and pick out something."

Ditscha obeys.

"Faust?" says the old lady, gazing doubtfully at the book her niece hands her. "But you are

old enough. Can you see? If not I will ring for the lamps."

But Ditscha crouches in the bay window opposite her aunt, and reads:

"Have now, alas, philosophy——"

Aunt Tina listens as the girl reads in a trembling voice:

"Ah, could I but in thy dear light
Wander at will on mountain height,
Round mountain caves with spirits hover,
Float in thy beams the meadows over.

Woe! do these walls still prison me?
Thou gloomy cell, my curse on thee!

Placed here by the Creator's hand
This is thy world! This place a world!

And still thou askest why doth throb
Timid the heart within thy breast?
Why pains inexplicable rob
Thy life of all sweet peace and rest?
Instead of living nature, where
God meant to dwell mankind, his sons,
In smoke and mould surround thee here
Grim skeletons and dead men's bones."

Ditscha suddenly stops reading, drops her head on the book and begins to weep aloud.

"Oh, Aunt Tina, Aunt Tina!"

Her aunt is alarmed. "Why, Ditscha, child,

Sophie dear!" she cries, and thinks: "Alas, the child now clearly realizes what she lacks, and longs for it!" And aloud she says: "What is the matter, my dear child?"

Ditscha springs up. "Oh, aunt, I will come again, please excuse me for a moment. I will only take a turn in the park. I am suffocating here in the room—please—please——"

Already she has fled, has picked up a shawl from the chair in the outer room, and now rushes downstairs and through the hall outdoors.

Sobbing, she hurries down a side path, on and on, past the gardener's lodge, and out of the park, as though its walls oppressed her. She walks on along the wet, rough path over the fields, between the park wall and forest. Ah, how desolate is this wintry world, how gloomy and cold, not a living being far or near; above her the silent clouds, near-by the silent forest, and yonder the quiet, gloomy manor house in the noiseless park.

Not a light shines in the windows,—of course not, they sit there in the twilight, they have nothing that they care to see in the pleasant lamplight, and grief and misery like to brood in the darkness. Aunt Bertha sits in the sofa corner, and Uncle Jo wanders up and down the room; neither speaks a word, for the departed, the drowned son's spirit flits about and asks them: "How can you even live yet without me? How can you even endure

existence? What are all your other possessions? Nothing—without me! A fine estate, a comfortable house, your mutual affection—nothing! And what have you in my stead? A strange girl—what can she be to you? Nothing! She is there, very well, she is there! Feed her for all I care, she will not crowd me out. I the chief person am here, although dead. Nothing and no one can replace me!”

Ditscha is desperate. “Ah, for one single heart to whom I might be something! But no one wants me, no one!” her heart cries out. “Papa does not miss me. Liesing I have now lost too, and Aunt Tina? Aunt Tina is only sorry for me, and glad when the dreamy, stupid girl leaves her room.”

Ah, if at least she might work, work until she was tired, like a day-laborer’s wife, and then find in sleep forgetfulness of her useless, superfluous existence.

But there is not even work for her.

She has climbed the grassy slope to the woods; there stands a rough rustic seat, dripping with moisture from the autumn mist, and strewn with withered leaves. In the west the black clouds have lifted slightly, the landscape is bathed in a faint yellow light; Ditscha stares at it until her eyes pain her.

Suddenly she hears the stamping and snorting

of a horse; a rider comes toward her across the fields at a short distance, a rider who at this moment checks the animal and, turned from her, gazes at the manor.

Her heart almost ceases beating; in spite of the twilight she recognizes him, it is Hans von Perthien. She stares at him fixedly, and has but one wish, that he may not see her. Why, she does not know herself. Suddenly he turns his head and gazes at her. A few minutes elapse, during which they do not take their eyes from each other, for he, too, has recognized her; then he springs from his horse, and, leading it, climbs the slope.

"Miss von Kronen, I call this luck!" His voice is so frank and gay that Ditscha's fears vanish. "What in all the world are you doing here at this hour?" he continues. "I imagined you sitting in the drawing-room at Beetzen, at the piano, improvising upon Beethoven themes, and now I meet you here. Do you know that I was so bold—you probably cannot understand it—as to call upon your uncle, or rather your aunt, again? Of course with the same success, the family was not receiving."

He had seated himself beside Ditscha, and kissed her trembling hand. The horse stood patiently beside him, the old animal seemed to be familiar with such situations.

"At Christmas time aunt receives no one," she stammered.

"Oh, and I had looked forward like a child to a continuation of the other afternoon."

Ditscha is silent.

"Will it always be so?"

"Yes!" says she hopelessly.

"And you put up with that?"

"As you see," quite as hopelessly.

"I should like to set fire to the old nest at all four corners," he laughs.

"Pray do so, I have no objection," says she defiantly.

He pricks up his ears, her mood is favorable.

"At all four corners," he repeats; "and then—then I would plunge into the flames to save you."

Ditscha shrugs her shoulders. "Mere talk," she thinks.

"This is not the right way!" he thinks to himself. "I wish," he continues, "you could visit my mother, such a dear, jolly little mother she is and how she loves sunshine and young people and gayety. Her only grief is that she has no daughter, a young daughter whom she could dress in pink tulle and take to balls, with whom she could grow young again."

"I would not suit her," she declares, against her will, almost roughly. "I do not want to go to

balls. I only want—I only——” She pauses, for she feels that a sob rises to her throat.

“I have no right to ask the cause of your grief,” he murmurs.

“I have no grief,” she gasps out in spite of her tears.

“If you only had a brother, Miss von Kronen. Imagine that you had one and he sat—he sits here beside you, would you not tell him?”

“I would say to him: My dear boy, you can not help me either!” she cries, springing up.

“Ditscha!” he whispers boldly, catching the folds of her gown. “Ditscha, do not go. I do not know when I will see you again. May I tell you something? Of late, Ditscha—I have been a wild fellow—but of late—ah, Ditscha——” he has sunk down beside her on the wet earth, and presses her gown to his eyes. “You could help me!” he murmurs.

Trembling, she has dropped down upon the seat again, the shawl has slipped from her head, and the heavy fog dampens her hair. She sees nothing more, she hears only his stammered words: he has been wild and wicked, but she can help him, make him good, for at sight of her a better, a purer world has opened before him! Did she not believe in love at first sight? Every evening he has come here along the forest road, and gazed up at her windows for hours,—did she never suspect

it? Will she help him to be a good man? On his knees he will thank her all his life, and—if she will not, then—then come what may!

This storm, burst upon her so unprepared, falls upon her heart like refreshing dew. Can she be something to a human being? Can she help some one to find the right path? She shudders, clasps her hands, and asks: "I? I? oh, what can I do?"

"Give me the hope of seeing you. By tolerating my love help me to win yours! Let me think of you in all that I do. Ditscha, dear Ditscha, love me a little, a very little!"

She can hear her heart beat. A chaos of dissenting voices seem ringing in her ears, only for a moment; then her resolve is taken.

"Ditscha, love me!" he pleads.

"Yes," says she childishly, "I will love you, Mr. von Perthien."

"Hans, Ditscha, Hans!"

"I will love you, Hans," she repeats solemnly, although she does not know how she is to begin; "but you must really be good," she adds.

"Oh, so good!" he whispers, and sits beside her on the bench, "so good! I am already. With you one cannot be otherwise than good." And he tries to clasp her passionately in his arms.

Then she springs up: "No, no!" says she, repulsing him.

"Why, Ditscha!" He is quite taken aback.

"You do not love me——"

"Yes—I will—I shall—but you—you must first speak to uncle."

"Yes, of course!" says he quickly. "I will go to him to-morrow—of course——"

"I will prepare him," declares Ditscha, and draws back another step, for he has taken her trembling hand and pressed it to his lips and eyes. "Ditscha—Sophie von Kronen, my *fiancée*!" he whispers passionately, and again tries to draw her to him.

Then she springs aside and glides like a shadow down the slope.

"Ditscha!" he calls, but already darkness has swallowed her up. He gropes up and down in vain, muttering an oath. Meanwhile she has run back by the way she came, and now stands inside the park, leaning against a tree, and sobbing as though her heart would break.

What has she done? What has she done?

How can she learn to love him? She scarcely knows him; yes, she feels that she is highly indifferent to him. She had imagined it would be quite different to be engaged—engaged!

What shall she do now? Upstairs Aunt Tina is waiting, and if she does not come soon Hannah will look for her, and besides it is almost supper time. Shall she speak to Uncle before? Or shall she wait for the third glass of grog after supper?

The latter seems the wisest plan, and she goes slowly into the house, upstairs, and knocks at Miss Clementine's door.

She has not even been missed.

The invalid raises from her book her eyes weary with reading, and asks: "Back already, Ditscha?"

"Yes, Aunt Tina," and she crouches in front of the stove as she feels one shudder after another shake her form.

"Aunt Anna was looking for you; she wished to tell you that the slippers you embroidered are to be given at Christmas to a young clergyman, who leaves for India in January."

It is so wholly indifferent to Ditscha at this moment, who receives her slippers. But she draws a stool up to Aunt Tina's side, crouches on it, and lays her head on the arm of the invalid's chair.

All evasions are distasteful to her; she has her father's soldier nature, but not a trace of diplomacy. She is honest, even at the risk of giving offence, and especially honest with herself.

"Aunt Tina," she asks, "do you think that I am capable of making some one—a man—happy?"

Aunt Tina listens in amazement.

"Yes," says she, "certainly, if you love him, if you wish to make him happy."

"Yes, I wish it."

"Ditscha!" cries the invalid, crimson with alarm.

"I have just become engaged, Aunt Tina," says she, as calmly as though she were saying: "I have just been dusting," or something similar. "You do not believe me, aunt? But it is true. I know I can make some one good and happy—is not that a worthy task for a life?"

"Who? who?" gasps the old lady.

"You do not know him, aunt,—Hans von Perthien. He is at Uechte, with old Calwarwisch, to learn how to manage an estate. His father and Uncle Jo were old friends—you say nothing, aunt?"

"No—I—what should I say—what can I say? Speak to your uncle, your father. May God spare you all the disappointment which such a precipitate step brings with it!"

Ditscha rises. She feels that she is not understood here.

"I shall speak to Uncle Jo at once—why should I be disappointed? I am so thankful that any one wants me."

"Ditscha, would you have said 'yes' so quickly if your father had not written you this morning that for the present you could not come to him, or if you had not received the news of Liesing's engagement?"

"It is possible, aunt, that papa's letter influenced my decision—yes, I believe it did. I am nothing to papa, so there is no reason why I should consider him. He will be glad to have me off his hands."

"And Uncle Jo and Aunt Bertha?"

"Well?" says Ditscha.

"Ditscha, ungrateful child!"

"Ungrateful? Why, Aunt Clementine, I am the only one who prevents them from wholly giving themselves up to their grief. I am not ungrateful. I surely do not wish to be! You do not understand, aunt, what our relations to each other are, you never see us together."

"No, I do not see you together; I merely think that, even if Jo cannot show it, he still is fond of you."

Ditscha's lips curl. She wishes more than that some one should be a little fond of her. And she knows better: when she is gone, the waves of every-day life will close over the tiny spot she has left, and all will go on as calmly and smoothly as before. No, no one will miss her.

"You are mistaken, aunt," says she shortly, kisses her hand, and goes to look for Uncle Jo.

At this time he is to be found in his study, at the writing-desk over which hangs the life-size picture of his dead darling; around him antlers, the whole room is fairly lined with antlers; even

the chandelier, the clock, the little smoking-table, and hooks for coats are made of them.

Uncle is smoking, the air is almost thick enough to cut, and sits bent over a letter which he is reading. He does not notice Ditscha's entrance; only when Cæsar rubs against her and gives a short bark does he see her.

"Is it you, Sophie?"

"Yes, uncle, I should like to speak to you about something. Have you time?"

"You, too, received a letter from your father, child?"

"Yes, but I have not come about that, Uncle Joachim."

"Ah? What is it then—out with it!"

"To-morrow you will receive a caller, uncle."

"No, indeed! Frederick has his orders."

"I wanted to ask you, Uncle Joachim, to make an exception for once in favor of this caller, and not refuse to see him. He wishes to ask you——"

She stammers and breaks off. Uncle Jo gazes at her in such amazement from under his bushy eyebrows:—"It is something important," she finishes softly.

"What is it then so highly important?" he asks nervously;—"and why are you so solemn and mysterious?"

"Mr. von Perthien——" she stammers.

He starts up, a whistle comes from his lips.

"Good gracious! I am sorry, yes, I am very sorry, dear child; but I really did not know what the gentleman in question had to say to me of importance," says he shortly and coldly, puffing vigorously at his pipe.

"But I know, uncle; he wishes to tell you that we are engaged. Don't be angry, uncle, I did not wish to trouble you; he has my consent already."

"Indeed! Well, for the present this consent is not yours to bestow, nor mine either. Therefore, pray do not consider yourself engaged as yet. The decision rests with your father. Mr. von Perthien may apply to him. If Klaus gives his consent, I cannot prevent you from rushing to your misfortune; if the decision lay with me I should say no. Do you understand? No!" he repeats loudly, knocking on the table so that the lamp trembles, and Aunt Bertha, deathly pale with fright, comes rushing from the next room where she had been sitting in the dark, and behind her Aunt Anna.

"Jo, you are always so violent," says the latter reprovingly. "Pray, what is the matter?"

"What is the matter? Who would not be violent? Here is a silly girl who has just told me she is engaged—*fait accompli*—and we are surprised with this—the young people of to-day. Confidence in older people's experience—respect—

no longer exist. Why, Bertha, you remember when we were engaged I went to your father, and——”

“Hans tried to come to you and court me in the customary way, but you would not let him into your house,” says Ditscha.

Aunt Bertha clutches at her throat as though she were suffocating. “Ditscha! Why, Ditscha!” is all she can bring herself to say.

But Aunt Anna cries: “She calls him Hans already! Jo, is not that quite as though two peasants had met one night at a dance, and the next day they are one! Child, foolish child, do you know what is in the Bible? ‘To marry is well, but not to marry is better!’”

“There are all kinds of things in the Bible,” thundered Uncle Jo. “It also says: ‘It is not good for man to be alone,’ but it depends upon whom one wishes to marry! It shall be as I said,” he continues, “I will not receive Mr. von Perthien. If this agreeable fellow fancies that because as a young man I was gay with his father he has a right to break in here like a wolf into a fold, he is mistaken. Go to your room, Ditscha, and think over your foolishness. I shall write to your father and also to the charming Mr. von Perthien.”

Ditscha stands in the middle of the room, her slender figure in its plain, dark-green cloth

gown drawn up to her full height, her delicate head visible in the clouds of smoke as though supported by them. Her eyes are lowered, her mouth defiant. She knows very well that if the noisy man there had taken her by the hand, had said to her, "Ditscha, child, do you really then love him? Have confidence in Uncle Jo; tell me, Ditscha, it is your imagination," she would have hidden her head on his breast and sobbed: "Uncle, I do not know—I believe you are right. I do not love him. I—it is pure despair on my part; help me, love me a little——"

But at this treatment her every nerve rebels. Wounded to the very heart, defiant, she goes out, and at each step of the stairs she repeats to herself: "I love him—Hans, I love you. I will help you, I will be true to you!"

And she writes him to this effect, begging him to expose himself to no unpleasantness, and not to come, since Uncle Jo is wholly opposed to the matter. "But I will be true to you, and to-morrow afternoon I will walk along the field path if you by chance——"

She stops, the blood rushes hotly to her cheeks. "A *rendezvous*! Sophie von Kronen, a *rendezvous*!"

She scratches it out, lays her head on the table and meditates. Then she writes the letter once more, omitting the conclusion. Sophie von

Kronen will not meet her lover secretly, he must content himself with the assurance of her fidelity.

It is hardly a love-letter; there is no trace of tenderness, of warm feeling, but she writes that she will keep her plighted word, that she hopes—no, that she is sure that her father will not refuse his consent.

Finally Hannah brings the young girl's supper to her room. Hannah is of course informed. But Ditscha has written to her father also, and now sits at a table working on a Christmas present for some one. She is perfectly calm by this time, and even smiles when Hannah brings in her supper, with a silent side glance at her.

"It is quite as though I had committed a crime, Hannah," says she. "Have I then stolen, or——?"

"Yes, I think so too, Miss Ditscha, as though you were seven years old and not allowed to come to the table. And I don't wonder that you want to get out of this house. But there is a door; why do you run your head through the wall, Miss Ditscha?"

Ditscha gazes at her gloomily.

"Don't be vexed with me, Miss Sophie, dear, but——"

"Ah, Hannah, pray do not you torment me too?" cries the girl. "Did you let people try to dissuade you when you were engaged?"

"No, indeed!" cries Hannah. "Ah, but he was a man—such a man! Much too good for me and for this old world."

"Oh, yes!"

"I know. Every one thinks her choice the best, Miss Ditscha. But when one has to take a great leap, she must first go back a bit—that is to say, think it over and pray, not hop over the ditch with both feet at once without thinking; and that is what you have done. God give you happiness!"

Ditscha is left alone, alone on the evening of her engagement; no warm words of congratulation, no loving speeches! She feels nothing but coldness and solitude. Suddenly she stretches out her arms: "If only I had a mother!" she cries aloud, "who would tell me what I ought to do. She would love me!"

But she has no mother, has never known one. She does not know the delight of a mother's kiss, does not know the feeling of boundless confidence, of protection such as one enjoys at a mother's side. She has only a father, who wrote to her to-day that she could not come at Christmas for—oh, some trifling reason. And Ditscha has dreamed for the last six months only of this Christmas visit by day and night; has longed for her father with every fibre of her love-thirsty heart, and she may not go.

Suddenly she fancies she hears Hans von Perthien's voice: "Ditscha, love me, save me, help me to be good!"

She will love him, she will—for very despair, not love.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DECISION.

"DEAR JO:—Of course Ditscha's happiness is very dear to my heart. Unfortunately I know her so little, and her choice not at all, that I must ask you—as on the whole I approve of not meddling in affairs of the heart, but allowing each to follow his or her choice—if the young man is a gentleman, and his circumstances are suitable, to give the two my consent.

"I say *if* the circumstances are suitable. I do not know the von Perthien family: inquiries are often unreliable, one never hears what one should, as you doubtless know.

"Ditscha will receive a dowry of twenty thousand dollars, and a suitable trousseau; eventually still more if I should have no son. Perhaps God will fulfil our petitions if only for your sake.

"I will try to come over as soon as matters are decided. I refused Perthien's visit; in our present circumstances we cannot see him. *Comprenez?*

"With hearty greetings,

"Your brother,

"KLAUS V. KRONEN."

This letter was followed by a laconic dispatch:

"Just received your letter with information about P. Refuse offer.

"KLAUS V. KRONEN."

"Aha!" says Uncle Joachim, and immediately takes a sheet of paper stamped with his coat of arms, and writes:

"MY DEAR MR. VON PERTHIEN:—In the name of my brother, Colonel Klaus von Kronen, I am obliged to tell you that he must, unfortunately, refuse the honor of accepting you as a son-in-law.

"Permit me to refrain from mentioning the reasons for this rejection. Chiefly they may be ascribed to my niece's extreme youth and ignorance of the world; besides which, you too, my dear sir, seem to me still too young and a trifle unsuited to found a family.

"With best wishes,

"JOACHIM VON KRONEN."

There! He concludes with a remarkable flourish, strews sand over it, then rings the bell and orders Frederick to tell Miss Sophie that he has something to say to her.

Ditscha comes at once. It is evening, before supper, and the first snow is falling outside.

"Here, read this, Ditscha. We mean well by you." He hands her the telegram.

"What did you write papa, Uncle Jo?" she asks after reading it.

"You have a right to know. Sit down!"

"Thank you, no!"

"As you choose. I wrote him that Hans von Perthien is a wild young fellow to whom it would be foolish to give a wife. Hans von Perthien has indeed made a name for himself in Halle by his wild pranks, but has caused his parents nothing but grief. He has quite a fine amount of debts, and as his father is absolutely unable to pay them, it is hard to say what will become of him."

She stands quite motionless.

"Is not that enough for you?" asks her uncle vexedly.

"Oh, I knew all that, uncle."

"Indeed! And in spite of this?"

"He told me all that himself, but he also told me that he would be a different man; he surely would if I would help him."

"Of course!" assents the old man ironically, "they always say that, these men. But you can really not help him. He must become another man by his own strength or remain what he is forever after. You are too good for that, so this letter goes to him."

"But if I—if I do not agree to it?" she cries angrily.

"You will, Ditscha!"

"Never, never, uncle. I will not retract my word."

"It is to be hoped that he is sufficiently a gentleman not to think more of a girl whose father rejects him."

She makes no answer, but stares fixedly at the same spot.

"So you will be sensible, eh, Ditscha?" he begins anew. "Be assured we only wish for your best happiness." But it sounds harsh and impatient. And as she leaves the room without a word, he begins to whistle. "Ah, bah!" he then says, "she will get over it. What else can she do? Take her own life? Thank God, not she; she has her five senses—hm—usually quite a sensible girl—well—well——"

Ditscha seems to justify his hopes: she is not missing from the supper table, nor the next day from meals. She goes about quite as usual. She does not, to be sure, say much, but she answers politely. She looks pale, pitifully pale. Ah, well, she will get over it!

Uncle and aunts calmly lie down for their afternoon naps. Aunt Anna sleeps. Aunt Tina sleeps, only Hannah sits at the window with her darning.

"There goes our little miss," she says; "and usually at this time she too lies on her sofa."

Ditscha wanders slowly along the main walk, then turns to the left in the direction of the gar-

dener's lodge, and disappears from the old woman's sight. After a brief moment of hesitation she opens the door and enters the gardener's lodge. At this time of day old Mother Busch is the only one there, busy about the house, while her husband and the under-gardeners are busy shaking the snow from the trees in orchard and park.

Ditscha wishes to ask if Carl Busch, the twelve-year-old boy, delivered the letter safely to Mr. von Perthien three days ago. She has had no news from him.

After knocking she opens the sitting-room door and pauses in amazement on the threshold, for there sits a young lady in the corner of the sofa, dressed in a very elegant *negligé*, and reading. When she perceives Ditscha she springs up.

"Oh, dear me! Miss Sophie!" she cries. "Do you not recognize me?"

"Is it you, Greta?" says Ditscha very slowly and coldly. "Where do you come from?"

"From Berlin, Miss. I wanted to see my parents."

"Ah! Are you doing well there?"

"Oh, thank you, very well—that is, one must make one's way, but it will be better some day. One will have some luck."

At this moment Mother Busch entered, a withered woman, prematurely aged by work. She tossed a wrap from the nearest chair, so that the

expensive jet trimming rattled, made an angry remark about her daughter's untidiness and rudeness, wiped the chair with her apron, and begged the "gnädiges Fräulein" to sit down. "Greta, make the coffee," said she, and the luxuriant little blonde in her blue morning gown, over-lavishly trimmed with white lace, in most remarkable contrast to the simple room, goes out smiling, her little nose in the air.

Ditscha gazed after her speechless. Mother Busch's eyes followed her half proudly, half vexedly, then she goes to a glass cupboard and opens it with great caution.

"Here is a letter for Miss," says she. "Carl was to give it to Miss when she was walking in the park. A young gentleman brought it last night."

Blushing deeply, Ditscha takes the note. The simple woman gazes at her with a look in which deep respect struggles with doubt and distrust. "Oh, Miss von Kronen!" she murmurs.

"What, Mother Busch?"

"Oh, the world grows queerer and queerer. I soon will not understand it at all," and the old woman takes the book her daughter has been reading, and the velvet mantle, and lays both on a chair in a corner, covering them with a sheet of the weekly paper. "Oh, I think so, Miss!"

Ditscha feels her cheeks burn. She knows the

woman wonders at her correspondence, but she dares not accuse herself by explaining.

"Will not Miss sit down?"

"Thank you, Mother Busch, only while I read this."

Just then Greta Busch comes in with supper. Ditscha inhales the odor of poor coffee, mixed with patchouly. Involuntarily her face takes on an arrogant expression, she puts the letter unread in her pocket, and turns to go.

The much befrizzed and bepowdered Greta smiles ironically, as this letter vanishes into Ditscha's pocket.

Mother Busch feels that she must say something.

"Yes, it is so, Miss. Children go their own way, and Greta, too, is to be married soon."

"Indeed?" Ditscha cannot resolve to be more gracious: the over-dressed girl with her bold smile is unspeakably repulsive to her. What has become of the dear little blue-eyed girl whom she used to know, who used to be brought, freshly washed and combed by Hannah, to the manor house to play with little Baroness Ditscha?

"Indeed?" says she coolly; "I congratulate her."

"Yes, and the young man seems to have a good position, eh, Greta?" continues the mother. "But we old people don't know these new fash-

ioned titles: I don't know what such a person is, a Spanish riding-school master, eh, Greta? Has he to do with horses? But how? I don't understand it. And now Greta says she must learn to ride too, and that seems dreadful to me, for it is not suitable for a girl of our class, and besides, she might hurt herself."

And Mother Busch shakes her head with a hopeless glance at her smiling daughter. Ditscha takes leave with a "Mrs. Busch, it is all in God's hands. Good-by, Greta! Good-by, Mother Busch! Perhaps Carl can do another errand for me," she adds.

Again old Mrs. Busch looks at her so strangely. "If it must be, Miss Sophie!"

Ditscha starts, and notices how Greta draws down her mouth. She throws her head back and leaves the room; the old woman follows her.

"O Miss! don't be angry. I've known you ever since you were little, and if I am only the gardener's wife, I love you as if you were my own girl."

"Then, pray attend to your own affairs," says Ditscha, with flashing eyes. "As long as I can remember, one of your boys has done little errands for me. What is the matter with you, Mrs. Busch?"

"O Miss!" says the old woman, wiping her eyes with the corner of her blue apron, "forgive

me. You are right. My girl—yes, it is true, I could cry myself sick when I look at her. But still she is only an ordinary girl, and there is no one to trouble about her but my man and me—but a young lady like you, Miss——”

Ditscha turns pale now, and violently turning her back upon the awkward old woman who dares lay down rules for her conduct, she leaves the house.

“Miss, Miss!” is called after her. “Carl can do it. Miss—anything you want, you have only to say it.”

But Ditscha does not answer. Quite disgusted she goes through the park. Near the broken nymph, in the most secluded part of the garden, she pauses and reads Hans’ letter. He writes calmly, lovingly; he feels that such happiness is not easily attained; he will earn it, and thanks her that she will wait; he hopes for good news from her father. “May I not see you once? Will you not come to our bench at twilight?” he asks. “Do so, please. Give me this proof of your love. I need it so I may keep up. Until death, your Hans.

“P.S. I will be there to-morrow at four.”

Of course he has not yet received her uncle’s rejection in her father’s name. Uncle only wrote to-day, and this letter was written yesterday, Ditscha tells herself.

She will go to the bench, and will tell him that in any case she will keep her word, but that he is not to consider himself bound, he who has so many other chances for happiness. She will tell him that she cannot write. Beetzen has no post and she no messenger—so they must wait in silence. That is all that she can do, if he agrees to it.

She turns and goes past the gardener's lodge to the park gate. It is quite dark now, but she distinguishes Greta Busch's white face pressed against the pane and staring at her. Let her think what she will. Ditscha is doing nothing wrong.

Near the bench, upon which to-day lie great flakes of snow, leans a figure. The horse stands in the road, with heaving sides and deeply bowed head, as though it had been ridden half to death.

Now the figure moves, and rushes to meet her.

"Ditscha, my Discha, what a meeting!" In spite of the cold he is glowing, his hat is pushed back, and he breathes quickly.

"Tell me at once," he says hoarsely. "You will give me up; you will do what your father and the old man over there decide; why should you not obey them? They are your relatives, and I am a poor fellow who can offer you nothing but his love and his honorable name. Tell it to me!

But, by God! if you give me up I will put a bullet through my head."

Ditscha is fairly stunned by this raving. "You know it already?" she stammers.

"I met the fellow with the note on the way," he gasps out. "What right have they to separate us? What have I done to your father that he is so unjust to me? But of course, influenced by that—that—by your uncle, and you too, say so at once, make it short——"

"I did not wish to say that," she stammers, writhing in his embrace.

He holds her all the faster.

"No, Ditscha, my angel Ditscha! Oh, if you will be true to me, then—then the old people must finally yield. You will be true to me, you will not give me up, Ditscha?"

"Yes," says she, freeing herself.

"Ditscha," he whispers in her ear, "if you would not I—by Heavens, I cannot live without you!"

"Oh, do not say that!" says she, with beating heart, "do not say that if it is not true. Do not lie to me!"

"It is true!" he answers aloud.

"It is true?" she repeats. "But you will have to wait, perhaps a long time, before there is the slightest hope for us: you will receive no letter from me, you will not see me——"

"Oh, ho!" says he threateningly.

"Yes—how then, Hans? Where?"

"A way must be found," he declares.

"There is none," says she.

"We can meet as now, Ditscha."

"No," says she shortly, throwing back her head.

"You do not love me, Sophie."

She wonders if she would have been able to refuse him so abruptly if she really loved him.

"Yes," says she unsteadily, "it is impossible. I cannot see you, Hans."

"You do not love me, Ditscha; it is best that we should part. Trouble yourself no more about me! One person more or less in the world does not matter, even if such an affair kills him, and then you can live at peace since you have not departed a step from the path of so-called propriety. Farewell. You are a clever, beautiful girl, but you have no heart!"

He calls the last words from his horse, and turns the animal and dashes away. He is a good actor, Hans von Perthien, and his rôle is not difficult to play with Ditscha. She is a charming girl although an icicle, and, good Heavens, Beetzen is not to be despised! Old Kronen has spent nothing for years, and his wife was a von Zweifelden. She must have brought him a dowry. If only he, Hans, can find means to accomplish his purpose.

Ditscha returns home with bowed head. On the dark, lonely path she suddenly encounters a woman in mantle and lace scarf, who draws politely aside.

"Are you not afraid, Miss?" asks Greta Busch.

Ditscha gazes at her in amazement. Greta must have seen Hans, must have seen them both. It is a wonder that he did not run over her with his wild riding. Had she meant to spy upon them?

"I am not afraid. Good - evening," says Ditscha.

"Some one was looking for Miss von Kronen," continues Greta Busch, walking beside her. "The baron came to our door himself. Then I told him Miss Ditscha had gone to the graveyard; he was just going out of the park."

"You should have let him, Greta Busch," says Ditscha arrogantly. "I should have been glad if he had come to meet me."

Greta bites her lips. She feels resentful toward this aristocratic girl, who is most certainly not a shade better than the frivolous, coquettish Greta Busch who is soon to marry a Spanish riding-master, as old Mother Busch calls him; which is somewhat near the truth, but with the difference that her *fiancé* is merely a groom in the Circus Bandini, who rakes the ring between two acts, and

is seriously determined to enter upon a more lofty career. Greta Busch, who has occasionally taken part in elaborate circus parades, made his acquaintance there, and with the help of the little dowry which she has come to extort from the old people, the couple intend to start a riding-school somewhere. Greta thinks this occupation very "high-toned," and to be "high-toned" has always been the one serious determination of her foolish head.

However, Ditscha is too good-natured to take abrupt leave of the girl with whom she has played as a child. So they walk together to the gardener's lodge, where Greta bids her good-evening with apparent humility, and gazes angrily after her.

Ditscha does not even suspect what an enemy she has just made. She enters the house weary and absent-minded, and does not know how to quiet her disturbed thoughts. Nothing is so terrible to her as to pain any one. If only she knew whether he really loved her so much.

Absorbed in her thoughts, she sits at table, and eats and answers questions mechanically.

"What were you thinking of to go to the chapel in all this wet and snow?" grumbles Uncle Jo.

"I was not at the chapel, uncle."

"But that silly girl of the gardener's told me so."

"Then she—then she lied to you, uncle. I was out on the path to the woods by the rustic seat."

"Crazy idea! Bertha, I tell you—" his thoughts have returned to the gardener's daughter—"just see what women are nowadays! The Busches are honest people, and yet they have such a fool for a daughter. If I were old Busch I would take my riding-whip and whip her until her finery fell off!"

Aunt Bertha nods, she has heard of it too. "Jo, we two no longer understand the world," she declares; "we go out too little. Perhaps the old simplicity now exists only here in our corner."

"The devil!" he cries. "What are we doing here now, Bertha?" and he blows his nose loudly.

"The devil! Yes, Jo, the devil!" sighs Aunt Anna. "You are right, Jo, the devil has Greta Busch by the collar."

CHAPTER V.

SELF-SACRIFICE.

DITSCHA is ill. She lies on her lounge, her cheeks burning with fever, and starts whenever the door opens. She has made up her mind. She dares not give Hans up, when he had implored her so earnestly to be a help and stay to him. If he should shoot himself in his despair, how could she bear it?

She has passed three strange days; no one worries about her, or does she only fancy this? She had thought surely her father would write her a kind, fatherly word, but no. Her father has indeed written, but to Uncle Jo, stating that in his opinion it would be better to treat the whole affair as a trifle, and not to speak of it to Ditscha. Young girls were always inclined to think such matters of great importance, Ditscha especially. Uncle Jo is quite agreed, and has instructed Aunt Bertha and Aunt Anna; and the latter has even given directions to Aunt Clementine and Hannah. Thus it happens that Ditscha's love affair seems wholly forgotten.

She worries and worries and becomes miserable.

This evening the pastor and head forester come. She can scarcely stand on her feet, her head aches so; but she resolves to go downstairs, for possibly they may speak of him. The forester's wife is the aunt of her best friend Liesing. The young girl had spent a whole summer in the forester's house; and Ditscha had entered with all her enthusiastic heart into this friendship. When little blond Liese returned home, Ditscha was ill with grief. She always hoped that Liesing would return, but she did not. She was absorbed in the social life of her Berlin set, found less and less time to write, and now—now she is engaged, and there is an end to the friendship. Ditscha does not even inquire for Liesing of her aunt. The matter is done with.

At table, the village *chronique scandaleuse* is discussed. Greta Busch is condemned. Mrs. Schulz has twins. Aunt Anna remarks that she wishes to have the coat of arms on the Kronen church pew regilded, whereupon Jo von Kronen remarks that he forbids it. Aunt Bertha sighs: "Why should you, Anna? It is good enough for Jo and me as it is."

The pastor's wife, who is very animated and deeply interested in everything, asks the forester's wife about the Büchow Casino winter ball.

"Oh, yes, I was there," says the forester's wife.

"Was it pretty?"

"A terrible crowd, very pretty gowns, but there is always a scarcity of men, even now when——"

"Yes," says the forester, "it is a shame. A whole row of pretty little girls who all have no partners, and such a *blasé* young fellow standing in the doorway and looking on heartlessly."

"So Büchow has come to that already," remarks Jc. "Heaven knows, Bertha, our boy would have—" he swallows the remark.

"I went up to the young gentleman, and asked him point blank if his boots were too tight," says the forester.

"Who was it?"

"Oh, one of Calvarwisch's agriculturists, his youngest acquisition, a handsome, stunning fellow, who stared at the fun as though he would poison all the little girls."

"Oh, yes," sighs the pastor's wife, "the young people of to-day! Weber, you enjoyed it when we danced, do you remember?"

"Instead of that they play cards and drink nowadays," declares the forester; "and at the end of the ball, the lazy fellow who would not dance sat in the supper room and did not know what he said, he could scarcely move his tongue."

Ditscha's heart almost stands still.

"And the two others, with the help of the waiter, carried him out to the coach, while old Calwarwisch swore finely."

"Who was the gentleman?" asks Uncle Jo loudly.

"I do not know his name," is the answer. "It was not Timpe, nor Reeden either, and Calwar-wisch has three; it was the latest comer."

All the color has left Ditscha's face. This is the result of her last interview with him,—despair drives him to such dissipation, and if he goes to his ruin it will be her fault. At this moment she seems to herself the most unconscientious creature in God's wide world.

After supper she succeeds in escaping to her room for a few minutes, and there in the greatest haste she writes him a note, and when Uncle drinks his fourth glass, and she is dismissed, she runs out in the gloomy park to the gardener's lodge. It is about nine o'clock. A piercing cold wind greets her, but the clouds have parted, and the rising moon hangs like a great dark-red balloon behind the bare branches of the trees. The Busch's house door is still unlocked. Ditscha quickly enters and knocks at the sitting-room door.

"Come in!" calls a voice.

As Ditscha crosses the threshold she perceives Greta Busch sitting before the bureau between the windows, opposite the mirror, curling her hair.

"Ah, Miss von Kronen," says she, rising.

"Good-evening! Is your brother Carl here?"

"No, Miss von Kronen, he has gone with my parents to my cousin's wedding at Uechte. Did you want him for anything?" With these words she busies herself with the hot curling-tongs, and Ditscha sees by the various articles of apparel lying about that Greta Busch is making a grand toilet. The girl stands there in embroidered dressing jacket—such as Ditscha does not possess—with blue ribbons, embroidered petticoat, and on her little feet patent leather slippers and silk stockings.

"I am going too," says she, "but there was no room in Farmer Jonas' carriage, my gown would have been crumpled. So I am waiting for the second trip. It makes no difference if I arrive an hour later."

Ditscha struggles with herself. Shall she put off sending the note until to-morrow? But then the boy will surely be tired and sleepy, and by to-morrow—who knows what may happen by to-morrow? She overcomes her scruples. She is doing nothing wrong.

"As you are going to Uechte? would you do me a favor?" she asks hesitatingly.

"Certainly!" declares Greta, fastening a veil over her towering frizzes.

"Give this note to your brother Carl, he knows——"

"Cannot I attend to it? You know, Miss, such

a boy is often not very careful and might lose it. Besides, I should not wonder if the gentleman were at the wedding. My cousin is farmer on the domain."

Ditscha gives her the note; she feels strangely uneasy as she does so, and would prefer to take it back at once as she sees the malicious face, quite radiant with a peculiar delight. Ditscha has once seen a picture, the picture of a girl with flames about her head, standing at the brink of a dark pool and gazing with the same expression at a man struggling in the water: "Will o' the wisp!" was written beneath it; how strange that she should think of it to-day!

A carriage now draws up outside, and Greta begs pardon, but she must hurry. She throws off her dressing sacque unconcernedly, and dons a light green gown trimmed with lace; fan and gloves lie on the table.

A very elegant toilet, thinks Ditscha, staring at a pair of imitation diamonds sparkling in Greta's ears. "Good-night, Greta," says she then shortly, "deliver it safely, and thank you."

"Good-night, Miss von Kronen. Oh, Miss von Kronen! please don't say anything to Miss Anna about my dress. She was here yesterday evening, and so angry that I was rather insolent." Again this smile that seems to say: "I only say this. I know that you will not betray me."

Ditscha leaves the house without answering. Now the wind is at her back, the moon has risen fully, and the garden is bright as day.

She feels indescribably sad and anxious and fairly timid. Suppose he will have nothing to do with her now? she asks herself. He would be right. Such a small, narrow-minded creature, who is afraid to pass a few social bounds, and rather lets a man go to ruin.

A light is still burning in the tower room. Aunt Clementine is probably, with Hannah's help, examining the moon through her telescope; in the floor below, where Aunt Anna lives, there is also a light. Ditscha creeps into the house and runs upstairs. It is a broad flight, built with the lavish disregard of space of former times, and leads up from the right of the huge hall. The equally old-fashioned chandelier hanging from the beams of the hall sheds a very faint light, as but one burner is lighted. On the broad landing near the deep window niche in which Ditscha used to love to play with her dolls—it is like a small room, to which two steps lead—she pauses and glances back.

A door has opened, the sitting-room door. Uncle Jo and Aunt Bertha seek their bedroom, which is on the other side of the hall. It is past ten o'clock. Involuntarily Ditscha stoops—she does not wish to be seen, and suddenly sinks down

on the nearest step, while her eyes rest in horrified amazement on the persons who slowly cross the hall.

Uncle Jo! For God's sake, Uncle Jo! How he staggers! Aunt Bertha supports him. Ditscha can see quite plainly the old man's darkly flushed face, from which the eyes stare so peculiarly, and the sad, troubled features of her aunt.

"Bertha," he murmurs, walking unsteadily, and flourishing his handkerchief; "it is all nonsense—and when I tell you that grog does not hurt me—it—does not hurt me——"

"Yes, yes, dear, but the rum was really all gone," says she gently, almost tenderly, and guides him toward the bedroom.

"Bertha, if Achim had stayed with us, he—he would have fetched me more rum—you may believe it—but because he is not here—ah, you accursed fellow—why need he go on the ice—mother—why need he——"

"Jo, here is the room, come," she interrupts him.

But he stands still. "And if at least we had found him—if he lay there in the cha—chapel, then I would lie beside him!" he cries with a sob, "but as it is, I have no wish to lie there—do you hear! I have no wish—I will not—Bertha—if at least we had—found him——"

Aunt Bertha has pushed the staggering man

safely across the threshold, the door closes behind them, and Ditscha still sits trembling with a feeling of disgust and pity never known before. As she hears something rustle behind her, she starts up with a faint cry.

"Hannah," she stammers, "Oh, Hannah, what was the matter with Uncle?"

The little woman with her round, apple-like face and eyes always swimming in tears, shakes her head. "Oh, nothing, nothing, Miss Sophie, it is only his way of mourning for the boy."

"Good Heavens!" says the pale girl. "He drinks because of his grief?"

"Miss Ditscha, he is not the first," remarks Hannah.

"Yes, yes," she stammers, pressing her hand to her forehead. The staggering form, the heavy tongue—how dreadful, how miserable, how unworthy of a man! And he, he too was drunk at the Büchow ball, and it is *her* fault!

"You must not grieve so, Miss Ditscha," says Hannah consolingly. "He is a good, a very good man in spite of it, and he is not always as he was this evening—only toward Christmas, when old recollections are more sharp, then it overcomes him and he tries to forget it in his old grog, and God will not count it a sin in him—that is my opinion. But now go to bed, Miss."

Ditscha goes to her room, her heart full of

horror, but quite firm in her resolve to keep Hans von Perthien from anything similar. She will do everything to prevent it, she *must*, it is her duty. Hans shall be saved!

The next morning Ditscha scarcely trusts her eyes when she sees at prayers Greta Busch, sitting between Hannah and the young chambermaid. Greta Busch with smooth hair, in a plain black woollen gown and cotton apron. She looks pale, her hands are folded in her lap, and her eyes are lowered.

Aunt Anna has chosen as text for her morning lecture the First Epistle of Peter, third chapter, third and fourth verses: 'Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of the apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.' And upon this she makes remarks which fairly amount to a denunciatory sermon, to the effect that people who forget their origin and rank are not at all fitted for Heaven, for which humility is absolutely necessary, and that if a gardener's daughter tries to act like a baroness she will never fare well, either here or in eternity.

Greta flushes slightly, but does not raise her eyes. The servants all look at her. Aunt Bertha

has apparently not heard, and Uncle Jo nods almost imperceptibly to his sister, as though to say: 'This time, as an exception, you are right.'

He looks terribly pale, Uncle Jo, only his nose and eyelids are red; he suffers physically and morally from yesterday evening.

After prayers, Greta kisses Aunt Anna's hand with remarkable humility, curtsies several times, then leaves the room with the others. Ditscha helps Aunt Bertha as usual to dust the ornaments, and as she does so steals glances at her.

Aunt Bertha is no different from usual. She wipes and polishes the little Meissner rococo figures with the same sad air of resignation, and Ditscha wonders whether this calmness is the result of greatness of soul or mere force of habit.

Before Ditscha seats herself at the piano she goes up to her room, and is not a little astonished when from a chair near the door rises—Greta Busch.

"Excuse me, Miss von Kronen. I come with Mr. von Perthien's answer. I knew no other way to smuggle myself into the castle than by coming to prayers. Miss Anna told me only a few days ago that if I ever felt a desire to hear God's word, to come to prayers."

Ditscha has flushed with anger at this flippant, irreverent speech and the girl's light laugh.

"Where is the letter?" says she, going to the other side of the room.

"A letter? Oh, how could Mr. von Perthien write a letter at that hour of night, and in the dancing room besides, where all the tables were full of people and covered with beer? He only tore a sheet from his note-book, and scribbled on it with a lead pencil. Here it is."

A tiny paper lies in Ditscha's hand now, folded like a druggist's powder, unsealed and probably read.

"Thank you," says she, and taking a coin from her purse she tries to press it into Greta's hand.

"No, thank you," says she, closing her hand. "I will take nothing. I only did it to oblige you—shall I wait for an answer?"

Ditscha shakes her head and turns her back, while she pretends to busy herself with a bunch of dried grass picked last summer, and now adorning the mantel shelf in a brown majolica vase.

"Good-by, Miss!"

"Good-by!"

As soon as the door has closed behind the girl Ditscha unfolds the paper. In scarcely legible writing she reads:

"I thank you. To-morrow, toward evening, at the usual place. I must see you.

"H. v. P."

She feels decidedly reluctant, but she must go, she must! She will and dare not think of herself.

Toward evening it rains fearfully. Ditscha sits at the window and gazes out; the park paths are like little rivers. The house is as deathly silent as usual; the tower clock has already proclaimed five o'clock in shrill tones through the darkness. Ditscha takes off her waterproof and felt hat. It is certainly impossible that he can be waiting for her in such weather. Then she takes up the cloak again hesitatingly. She must not fail him; it cannot hurt her to get a little wet; she has stout boots. But if any one should meet her as she goes through the house, he would think her crazy; would prevent her from going out in the storm.

However, she succeeds in descending the stairs unseen, and hurries past the clock, whose pendulum swings on without betraying surprise. Ah, how much it has seen, this clock! The house is uncannily lonely. Ditscha turns the knob, opens the heavy outside door a mere crack, and slips out. The rain beats in her face, she does not notice it; she hurries down the path; her feet splash in the water, she is not afraid of getting wet. At the fence of the gardener's house, enclosing the little garden in which is old Mother Busch's grape arbor, a form bars her way.

"Pst, Miss!"

It is Greta Busch, who has thrown a shawl around her, and hurried out of the house.

"Miss von Kronen, come—he is inside."

"Where?" asks Ditscha, evidently amazed.

"In our best room. You could not talk out-doors here in this storm; you would be drenched, Miss."

Ditscha stands still irresolutely.

"Come, Miss, no one will see you. Father is in the greenhouse, and mother is in bed; she took cold yesterday evening." And Greta pushes her arm under Ditscha's. "This way, Miss, there is a puddle in front of the door, a little more to the right—so—so."

And Ditscha crosses the garden in front and enters the house. As the door closes behind her, Greta carefully holding the bell, she makes a sudden move to go. The whole importance of this step, the gloomy shadow of coming unhappiness which follows it, suddenly overcomes her with as much force and distinctness as though lightning had disclosed a dark region, or as though she were suddenly gifted with second-sight. But in the same moment she feels herself held fast and embraced.

"Ditscha, my life, my rescuer, my happiness!"

She repulses him and looks around. Greta has vanished. With two bounds Ditscha is at the door to run away, then he is beside her.

"Go," says he sadly. "I will not detain you, I knew how it would be."

For a moment she presses her hand to her forehead, then she turns and holds out her hand. "Forgive me," says she softly.

A lamp burns in Mother Busch's best room. Ditscha seats herself on the sofa, he paces up and down. Neither speaks a word. She dare not raise her eyes. She has no other thought than that she is doing something that she should not and yet *must* do.

Finally he comes over and kneels before her.

"Ditscha, I thank you. I know how hard this secrecy is for you, but do not give me up. You do not guess what I have suffered in these last days."

"Really?" she asks.

"I could do nothing, could neither work nor rest, always with the thought: She does not love you, she does not love you! Ah, I could have drunk of the waters of Lethe to forget you, or, as the noble liquor is no longer to be obtained in this miserable world—wine, wine!"

Suddenly she clasps her hands.

"Oh, not that," she pleads childishly, "only not that, it is dreadful, and—I was so desperate when I heard that in Büchow you were so——"

He smiles, but as he looks in her face he understands her and becomes grave and gloomy. "If

my good angel turns away her face—" he murmurs.

"What is to be done now?" she asks, after a long pause during which he has pressed her two hands by turns to his lips.

"I do not know," he replies; "all depends upon you. If you will be true to me, if I may sometimes see you, kiss your hand, then I will be so brave, industrious, and contented, Ditscha."

"But where can I see you? I cannot meet you at evening on the road like a peasant girl!"

"No, you cannot, and besides winter is coming."

"Uncle will not let you come to the house, and especially not now, toward Christmas. Our house is like a tomb. I shudder when I think of another Christmas."

"I tell you, Ditscha, I must see you!" he cries violently.

She shrugs her shoulders imperceptibly, and gazes blankly at him.

"You could see me here, Ditscha."

"Here? No, no! This Greta Busch stares at me so strangely—I cannot bear her. I think she must be bad. Please, not here."

"But she is initiated!" he cries.

"And who did it?" she asks angrily.

"You, my dear little goose! Or do you fancy that this Greta has no sense? When a beautiful girl gives her a letter for a young gentleman,

she may well think that it is a question of—well, what then—an embroidery pattern or something similar?”

Ditscha bows her head and bites her lips.

“Oh, you do not love me. Ditscha, do not force yourself,” he sighs, and goes to the stove in which a bit of peat glows. “Do you know, such matters cannot possibly be carried through, unfortunately, without an ally. She is faithful, this Greta. And as to what she thinks? Not much, only that we are two people who love each other, who are not allowed to see each other but will not be parted. And if she thinks anything more it probably is: ‘Poor souls, I will help you, so that you do not perish of longing and despair;’ and that we would do. Ditscha, at least I should. I do not know about you. I do not believe it—but I, poor devil, my life is not worth a farthing to me without you.”

“Please do not say that.”

“But I do say it!” he cries, throwing his riding-whip on the table. “I do say it, for it is the truth; and if you give me up—well, you know what——”

Ditscha thinks of Uncle Joachim, of the drunken Uncle Joachim. “Here, here then I will come—but——”

“No but!” and again he kneels down and behaves as though foolish with happiness and

gratitude, while a couple of great tears fall from the girl's eyes, and she rests her hands on his head. The most matronly situation possible, as though a mother blessed her son.

"May I write to my mother about it?" he asks, and as he raises his handsome face to hers, with his bold, flashing eyes, she nods.

"Do so, and send her my love, Hans."

Then she rises and looks for her cloak. She does not succeed in escaping the usual parting kiss. She leaves the house before him. He has undertaken to inform Greta.

Greta laughs when he tells her that he and his *fiancée* wished to meet here. "Oh, yes," says she, "Miss von Kronen—oh, yes, it is all the same; one person is just like another, always the same story. I do not care."

"Do not be pert, my child," says he carelessly, patronizingly; "it is not always the same, even if it looks so." He has put on his cap, nods again to her, and leaves the room. Her mocking giggle echoes behind him, and as he turns he sees her make a face at him.

"Crazy thing!" he says to himself without troubling further about it.

CHAPTER VI.

CLANDESTINE MEETINGS.

IN the manor house everything goes on as usual. The days are short, the evenings endless; outside it is cold, wet, and stormy.

"A green Christmas," murmurs Uncle Jo. "Would that it were always a green Christmas, then there would never be ice—and—then—yes, then——"

Aunt Clementine watches Ditscha as much as she can, and Hannah spies on her. "She seems finally to have gotten the unfortunate affair cut of her head," is the result of these observations.

Ditscha is more quiet and dreamy than ever, only sometimes there are moments when she seems fairly pursued by unrest. Aunt Clementine is inexpressibly sorry for the child, living in this cold, grief-stricken atmosphere. She resolves to prepare her a little Christmas celebration on her own account and secretly, for although a Christmas tree cannot be brought into the house, up in her own rooms one may surely be lighted.

"Hannah, get me a tiny tree from those cut, and some candles," she orders, "for this year it

is doubly sad for our child. Hannah, I think it would be far easier for Ditscha to bear this sad Christmas if some one were to tell her the truth," she adds. "I do not understand such foolish prudery. I am convinced that if Ditscha knew she would have a little brother or sister, it would delight her."

"Yes, of course, Miss," assents Hannah, "but how if her father absolutely will not let her be told?"

Ah, how right Aunt Clementine was! What might they not have prevented if they had told this lonely young creature: "About Christmas time you will have something that you can love with all your soul, with your whole warm heart. It is not for a trifling reason that you are kept from your father's house." How often Aunt Clementine regretted that she had not taken Ditscha's hand and said to her: "Rejoice, Ditscha, this year either a brother or a sister will be born to you."

Aunt Clementine hopes for so much, so very much from this little new-comer. In the first place she hopes it will be a boy for the sake of Jo and Beetzen, an heir, something to replace his loss. Joachim, with his kind heart, would surely finally take interest in a little Baron Kronen, even although he could never forget his heart's darling. And then she hopes for Ditscha, and all the old house. She longs for the child as the earth for

the sun, for it is to bring light and warmth and new life. As yet, to be sure, the announcement of the expectation of an heir has caused even deeper grief to Jo and his wife; they sat there with strangely pale faces, as though they could not bear to think of Beetzen belonging to any one but their son. In these November days, both mourners would have preferred that the ground might open and swallow up all Beetzen, together with them and their ever-sorrowing hearts.

No one notices Ditscha's love affair. In the first place they would all have considered it absolutely impossible that a daughter of the von Kronen house should hold secret meetings with the man whom the family council had wisely decided should be refused her; and in the second place, for the same reason the matter is at an end. As long as the von Kronen race has existed, never has a daughter of this house married except with the full consent of all the members of the family. Their choices were always suitable, the circumstances highly proper in every respect. After the customary, strictly observed period of betrothal, under the eyes of her mother, each daughter advanced to the altar, a dignified, worthy bride, to become the virtuous, highly esteemed, faultless mistress of some noble estate.

So they pay no further attention than usual to Ditscha, the affair is settled. Nor do they notice

that the beautiful girl becomes more and more quiet. At all Uncle Jo's jests, which follow the second glass of grog now as formerly, she draws back crimson and offended, and neither uncle nor aunt notice this, for Jo von Kronen's gayety is only a flicker, which the third glass quenches, to soften the old grief. Aunt Clementine has somewhat sharper eyes, but not enough. She only perceives that the girl's mood changes, that she passes from the deepest depression to the most terrible nervous irritability; that she either says nothing, or makes long speeches about duty, love, and unselfishness—speeches which the invalid does not understand, and which she seeks to discourage by allusions to every-day affairs.

Poor Ditscha! She can no longer endure matters as they are at present, she to whom lies and secrecy are so distasteful that when she goes to the gardener's house to see Hans von Perthien it seems like walking to the scaffold. Hans, who always receives her with the same reproach, that "she does not love him," who complains in the bitterest terms of this horrible secrecy, and always ends by imploring her to be true to him, to save him, each time giving his word of honor that if she leaves him he will sink into the mire, the deeper the better, and that, by Heaven! it is all the same to him if some morning he is picked up out of the gutter.

Sometimes he speaks too of his mother, and how delightful it will be when they both live at Wandersleben, and Ditscha takes the keys from the old lady and says: "Now rest, I will take your cares on my shoulders!" "That will be a life of true fulfilment of duty, eh, Ditscha? For you see, work and fidelity to one's calling are the true happiness."

He has now discovered that Ditscha takes life seriously, that she is sick with longing for self-sacrifice and love—serious, true love. Flippancy, flirtation, and coquetry are wholly foreign to her.

She suffers tortures at these meetings. She sits on the sofa, her hands clasped tightly, starting at every sound, her beautiful, childish face now deeply flushed, now deathly pale. A hundred times she is on the point of crying: "I can bear it no longer, give me back my word!" Then again she sees before her Uncle Jo, tottering, mumbling, and she is silent. Greta Busch usually comes with her work and seats herself at the table near the young couple, her brother Carl placed on guard in case her mother should call or her father look for her. Ditscha wishes Greta's presence, although she is very unsympathetic to her, and Hans von Perthien has really no objections, for the "virtuous little icicle," who at coming and going barely permits him a kiss, who defends her absurdly strict views so positively and decidedly, and be-

haves as differently as possible from a *fiancée*, makes the situation quite tiresome, he thinks.

Greta adds some humor. She tells of her Berlin life, as much as she thinks best, and sometimes she whistles the melody of a couplet to which Hans knows the words and laughs heartily, while Ditscha gazes at him in astonishment, and Greta whistles on unabashed, with the verve of a Berlin street urchin alone. Before the hour of parting arrives Greta discreetly vanishes, and Hans von Perthien has sufficient opportunity to assure Ditscha how much he loves her, and that he is lost without her.

Old Mother Busch still lies ill. She does not suspect what is going on in her best room, nor does Father Busch notice anything. He dozes away, and never enters the room. His wife's ambition to possess a best room always annoyed him. He would have preferred to use the room as a bedroom, instead of the one upstairs; but "all women are alike," he grumbles, "and can't be happy without a glass cupboard and a couple of gilt cups."

Now comes the time when old Mother Busch is to leave her bed, and Greta herself is uncertain whether she will notice anything, or if she does notice, whether she will be silent. "Mother is so queer about such things," Greta declares. "She would be quite capable of going straight to the

baron." Greta knows from her own experience how "queer" Mother Busch's views are on "such matters," and that the good, honest woman would rather die than give Miss Ditscha opportunity to meet her lover behind her uncle's back in her (Mother Busch's) house—Miss Ditscha, her darling and pride, and whom the old woman calls the sunshine of Beetzen.

The three young people are again assembled in the "best room," when Greta whispers these remarks. It is the 16th of December, and Ditscha has made use of the time to grow pale and thin, for she cries all night long, and wavers between self-scorn and a desire to sacrifice herself.

"And besides," continues Greta, "it must be different soon, Miss Sophie. I am to be married immediately after Christmas, and then I shall go to Berlin, and as I have already told you, Miss, mother will not let you meet here, she is so queer."

Ditscha, who is sitting on the sofa, does not raise her eyes from the floor, and is very pale. Hans von Perthien stands by the stove, and after asking leave, Greta seats herself at the table and embroiders industriously on a chair cushion. She can talk as she does so, for she is only filling in, the horse's head with waving mane is already finished in gray and white beads. This tasteful piece of work is to adorn the sofa in Greta's future

home, and meanwhile serve as Christmas present for her Alfred.

"Ditscha, what is to be done?" Hans von Perthien begins his old story. "I cannot endure not seeing you."

"I know what I would do," declares Greta; "I would marry on the sly. Afterward, when nothing can be done, the family will be satisfied." Greta had read flowery description of secret marriages in her circulating library novels, but had not the slightest idea as to whether such a thing were possible. Ditscha is so inexperienced that she knows absolutely nothing of law except what one commonly hears about it. She has indeed heard of secret marriages, but she shakes her head.

Hans von Perthien bites his lips. Greta has said what he has long wished to propose, and yet dreaded to do so at sight of Ditscha's pure child-eyes.

That a secret marriage is absolutely impossible here in the country he knows, but if he could persuade Ditscha to fly with him, then papa and Uncle Kronen would surely let the wedding follow very soon, and—Hans von Perthien struggles like a drowning man with his creditors; besides he is really foolish about the beautiful creature, and with her and her dowry he can live like a small prince at Wandersleben, over in the Harz Moun-

tains. Besides, the world is so deadly monotonous, when anything romantic happens it is an actual blessing. Of course the matter will make a great stir, and all the usual performances will follow—a father's curse, disinheritance, scorn of Ditscha and her chosen—or will they merely be silent, absolutely silent? The latter is the more probable.

Greta works on unconfusedly. Ditscha sees herself at Wandersleben. Ah, if it could be so! She knows exactly how the house looks from Hans' descriptions; it lies in the midst of a shady garden, and from its terrace one can see the blue Harz Mountains. And on this terrace sits Mamma Perthien, with her knitting, Mamma Perthien whom Hans so resembles; near her, Papa Perthien in his armchair, and both smile, for the load of life is taken from their shoulders. Ditscha pours out coffee, and says Hans, her husband, must soon come back from the field. and Papa Perthien strokes Ditscha's hair and says: "That the wild fellow has become such a fine, upright man, we owe to you, little daughter!" Oh, how delightful, how delightful it could be!

"It is time," says Greta finally. "The clock on the manor house has struck six."

Ditscha starts up. Greta has sprung up and gone out.

"Good-by, Hans!" whispers Ditscha.

"Good-by! And you say not a word of seeing me again, Ditscha?"

"I do not know what to suggest, Hans."

At this moment the door flies open. Greta springs into the room with a couple of cat-like leaps, and puts out the lamp. "Miss Anna!" she whispers; then she is gone again, and Ditscha hears her lock the door and draw out the key; then the harsh voice of the stern Aunt Anna, so concerned for the welfare of all the family dependents.

"Good-evening, my dear Father Busch, how is your wife? What is Greta doing? Does she take good care of her old mother, my good Busch?"

Old Father Busch stammers something of honor and pleasure, and "will not the gracious mistress come in?" and thereby he turns the knob of the best-room door.

Ditscha has fled to the window and has sunk down on a chair: pressing her hands to her face in alarm and dread she trembles for the next moment. Hans von Perthien stands in the middle of the room and mutters an oath under his breath. But neither of them knows the skill of their protector.

"O father!" says Greta; "what are you doing? Is not the door open? Let me see—no, it really is locked and the key gone! Oh, mercy! Miss Anna; now I remember I mislaid it yesterday. Oh, if Miss Anna will come into the sitting-room for a moment I will look for it at once——"

"Girls who have their wits about them *never* mislay keys," says Aunt Anna sternly. "Never mind to look for it now, but come into the sitting-room. I wish to speak with you about your mother; and you, Busch, come too, I have a new remedy for your wife to try."

The last is hardly distinguishable. They have gone into the sitting-room and the door has closed after Father Busch's shuffling feet.

Ditscha's overwrought nerves give way now, and she bursts into convulsive weeping. "I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it!" she gasps. "I will go. Let me out! Open the door!"

"Be sensible, Ditscha," says he calmly, and holds her hands fast on the knob which she is trying to shake. "I, too, cannot bear it longer, but for the moment I can do nothing. For God's sake let go of the door!"

She loosens her grasp and goes back to the window, while he resumes his post by the stove.

"Ditscha," says he, "Ditscha, we must make an end to this; it is unworthy of you and of me. Let us marry without your relatives' consent."

Now she ceases weeping. "Oh, that is so hard!" she stammers.

"Yes, certainly! But it is harder if they make us unhappy by parting us. Or do you believe that they will ever consent?" he says.

"No," she whispers.

"Well, then, we must help ourselves. I will consider what is best to do," he continues. "It will need a few days' preparation, but then have courage, Ditscha. You see yourself that matters cannot go on thus. Either we part *now* and you think no more of me, or we must be united forever. Sophie, I will not urge you; dear heart, think it over. For my part, I am firm. Give me an answer by letter. You cannot run such a risk as this again."

He has now felt his way over to her and holds her in his arms for a moment and kisses her. Then he opens the window, noiselessly unfastens the shutter, and swings himself out nimbly.

"Ditscha, my all, think it over!" he whispers again, while he carefully closes the shutters from the outside.

Then all is silence about her, terribly quiet, dark, and lonely. She could cry like a frightened child. But he has taken the right tone to impress her. This evening Ditscha loves him, or thinks that she loves him, and is resolved to follow his decision, to be his.

After half an hour Miss Anna leaves the next room. In the hall she gives Greta another lecture. Ditscha hears every word.

"I am glad that you are trying to return to your old simplicity in your outward appearance. I cannot see into your heart. May that too have

improved! Without and within are always related, and God sees the heart. Be a simple, saving wife to your husband, that is more fortunate for him than to get a silly, dressy fool; and instead of bead cushions, make him another time a nice shirt. Give mother the drops punctually, and speak a little kindly to her. Tell her that she must be patient. Patience is one of our Christian virtues. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Miss," says Greta, and her feet fly to Ditscha's door; softly, softly she puts the key in the lock and opens it.

"Now you can go," she whispers with a giggle. "Aunt Anna has gone, and father sits dozing in his armchair. She talked so much."

She strikes a match, and in the flickering light Ditscha sees her merry, laughing eyes. It is a situation quite after Greta's heart, like a scene in a gay comedy. But Ditscha walks past her so pale and grave that she somewhat moderates her mirth.

"Good-night, Miss Sophie," says she gravely. "Be very quiet so that father does not hear you." Ditscha hurries home.

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTMAS AT BEETZEN.

CHRISTMAS is the time when Aunt Anna feels quite in her element. She represents her brother and sister-in-law entirely then, as they are never visible on Christmas eve and the following day.

Yes, Aunt Anna is the soul of the house at this time. With her large, stout figure in a black gown, with a huge white apron over it, and a black lace cap on her still blond hair, Aunt Bertha's basket of keys on her arm, she goes up- and down-stairs with great dignity, arranges the gifts on the table, and prepares to read one of the Christmas Gospels to the people, who assemble on the eve of the festival in their holiday clothes, and are arranged according to their rank. Frederick at the head of the line, then the older, dignified coachman with his wife, Hannah, the cook, and so on down to the laundress, Father and Mother Busch, his assistants, and a crowd of village children who could with difficulty conceal their happiness, and joined in gayly when Aunt Anna started the Christmas carol. What do they know of the grief hidden in this house?

But Aunt Anna never forgets to say in conclusion: "And think of those to whom this day is a sad one, who can feel no joy, since God in His unfathomable wisdom took from them on this joyous feast day instead of giving. Pray for your master and mistress, that God may comfort them and give them peace—that peace which passeth all understanding, which is better than all earthly happiness. And now go and celebrate the feast with your dear ones, whom may God preserve for you a long time; celebrate it in the Christian way, in the house of God, who is with you now and forever. Amen!"

She had spoken thus again to-day beside the table of gifts, and tears ran down over her full cheeks. Ditscha stood beside her, deathly pale, her hands clasped. She appeared to have understood nothing of all this, for as the children now began to carol, she started, and her gaze seemed to come back from the far distance.

Hannah came up to her and whispered: "Come up to Miss Clementine after supper, Miss Ditscha."

She nods and stares at the group which now crowds around the table of gifts; and she lays her hand in one hard right hand after another. She feels trembling, cold hands, and little, hot children's hands, and hears again and again: "Oh, thank you very much, and a happy Christmas!"

Finally the last one is gone. The kitchen-maid

sweeps away the crumbs and sets the table for supper, for the Christmas dainties are eaten to-night—to-morrow nothing festive exists in the whole house.

Ditscha goes with Aunt Anna to the village to various sick and poor, Frederick and the coachman following with baskets; the usual Christmas presents are also left at the pastor's and a short call made. Then they turn back to the park.

In the gardener's house the best room is lighted up. Ditscha knows that the *fiancé* has arrived, the "Spanish riding-school master," as old Mother Busch calls him. Aunt Anna crosses the front yard unconcernedly and peers through the window.

"Would you believe it," she says, joining Ditscha again, who has remained in the path; "they have set the table with napkins and glasses, and the future husband sits on the sofa beside the dressy creature, and the old people on chairs. Sometimes I think there will be another flood."

In the hall of the castle Ditscha takes off her hat and cloak, throws both hastily on a chair, glances at the clock, and disappears down the dim corridor upon which her uncle and aunt's room open. Uncle Jo's the last of the line.

"Ditscha, where are you going?" calls Aunt Anna from the staircase; but the girl does not answer. After a short, decided knock, she turns the knob and enters.

Uncle Jo sits as usual before the writing-desk, but the pipe between his lips is cold, the newspaper not even unfolded. His hands are clasped on the desk, and his eyes fixed upon his son's picture, representing a handsome, smiling boy in a velvet suit riding a pony. As the girl goes up to him he turns his head, and she starts at the hopeless expression of his eyes.

"Do you wish anything?" he asks absently, without seeming surprised that she visits him at this time.

"Only one question, dear Uncle Joachim."

"Well!" he says.

A burning blush rises to her thin face. Involuntarily she clasps her trembling hands and asks almost hoarsely: "Would you—you and papa—*never* change your views as to my love for Hans von Perthien?"

"No!" is the calm answer.

"Never? Even if——"

"No, my child! I am sorry that you have returned to that. I thought you had gotten over this affair."

She made no answer, let her arms fall, and stared fixedly at one spot.

"He has probably asked you again, has managed to write to you?" says he, his gaze following her eyes. They rest on a yellow old steel engraving, Romeo and Juliet on a balcony. For

forty years the picture has hung there, even during his father's life-time. Now it suddenly gives him an uncomfortable feeling.

"Answer, please!" he cries impatiently.

Slowly her eyes return to him. "What did you say?" she stammers.

"I ask if he has written to you?"

"No!"

"Well, then, how do you come back to the subject?" he cries in his rough way. "Never, do you hear? *never* is it to be thought of. You know the reasons."

She stares at him, nods a few times, and quietly goes to the door.

"Ditscha!" he cries.

She turns.

"Do not torment yourself and us with the foolish business. Your happiness will be found elsewhere, little girl; and if I am rough do not take it amiss. You see—now—well, you know—Good-night, my child."

His voice dies away; hastily he motions to her to go, and she does so. A last effort to quiet her timid, irresolute heart! She would have preferred that Uncle Jo had stormed and treated her badly; his voice suffocated by tears torments her fearfully.

Aunt Anna and she eat alone in the large dining-room whose walls, wainscoted half to the ceil-

ing, display the von Kronen arms in wood carving, surrounded by cherub heads. Deep shadows lie in the corners of the room, only here and there a brass plate or glass dish, with which the ledge at the top of the wainscoting is covered, shines out. The places of the master and mistress are empty. Frederick serves as noiselessly as possible.

Ditscha scarcely eats anything. She looks around the room and thinks that she sits in it for the last time in the lamp-light, protected and warm, while outside the winter storm rattles the shutters; and how will it be when they are all assembled here at table without her? Will they curse or forgive her? And will she ever cross this threshold again? It has been, as well as it could, a home to her.

Aunt Anna eats with the best of appetites. "You are going to Christmas service to-morrow, Ditscha?" she begins.

Ditscha nods.

"You know to-morrow I will stay with my brother and sisters, but one of us should in any case be in the pew."

And as the young girl does not answer, she continues: "It would be better for Joachim to give up his murmuring against God's will and make peace with Him, but as yet he is far from that." Aunt Anna sighs. "Now, I suppose you are going to Clementine?" she continues.

Ditscha nods again.

"Give her my love. I have more writing to do. Good-night, Ditscha. Upstairs you will find something from me. I hope it will please you."

"Thank you, aunt," says Ditscha, folding her napkin—for the last time! she thinks.

Upstairs in the tower Hannah stands waiting in the little ante-room, and as she hears Ditscha's steps she calls, opening the door: "Wait here a moment, Miss Ditscha! When Miss Clementine rings then come in!" With this the little woman opens the door of the sitting-room the merest crack, from which a bright light shines, and darts through.

Ditscha stands patiently and waits. Here too she takes leave of the old cupboards and corners in which she has played with her dolls; of the bay window with its view of the wide, wide world. She goes nearer and gazes out—for the last time! In the distance lights move, that is the train hurrying to Hamburg. Ah, to-morrow!

The sound of a bell startles her. Hannah opens the door. In clear, silvery tones aunt's music box plays "Quiet night, holy night," and as Ditscha enters, there by the invalid's couch the thirty candles of a little evergreen tree burn with such a Christmas air that the unexpected sight—Ditscha has never had a Christmas tree—so startles her that she sinks upon the nearest chair, buries her

face in her hands, and cries as though her heart would break. She knows what an effort it must have cost Aunt Clementine to do this, and why she has done it, but now it is all too late.

"Come, Ditscha," says the invalid gently.

She totters across the room, and lays her head beside Aunt Clementine's on the cushions.

"Do not cry, child," says her aunt pleasantly. "You do not know how little reason you of all others have for weeping. Look at what lies under the little tree and be happy."

Ditscha starts up. "I have certainly no reason to weep," says she, with quivering lips. "I have everything that my heart can desire. I sit in a well-warmed room, have had a good supper, and here burn candles on a tree for me, while presents lie under it. I shall sleep in a soft bed, and—the forester's wife's beloved dog has the same, only instead of candy, sausages hang on the branches." Now she laughs shrilly and, hastily wiping her eyes, springs up and goes to the table.

Hannah is crimson with anger. Girls of to-day are crazy, she thinks; and glancing at the invalid, who has grown pale, she says reprovingly: "And I suppose the little beast will get books to read too, and ornaments and money, and all such things as lie there. Eh, the dog will have just the same?"

But the invalid makes her a sign. She has had the same unsatisfied longing, the same hot young

heart; she knows the torment of inactivity, of waiting for a future.

For a long time Ditscha does not notice the pretty gifts; she stares at the floor and presses her lips tightly together to keep back a nervous sob. After a while she succeeds; she comes over and kneels beside the old lady again. "I thank you for everything, aunt," says she softly, "and please do not lay it up against me if I wounded you. I know I have been so rude, so bitter—forgive me."

And Aunt Clementine strokes her cheeks and her brown hair. Then both are silent, and watch the candles burn down. And Hannah brings a basket and lays the presents in it. There is something from Uncle and Aunt Bertha among them, an old ornament of Grandmother Kronen; she wore the diamond pendant on a chain around her neck when the city of Büchow gave, in the city hall, a reception in honor of the beautiful young Queen Louise, to which the nobility were honored with invitations; now it is set as a brooch. Papa sent money; Hannah hands Ditscha the purse, and she puts it indifferently in her pocket.

When it strikes ten she rises. "Good-by, Aunt Clementine, think kindly of me!"

"You are a strange child, Ditscha," says she. "And listen, Mousie, do not cry so much to-morrow, when you must be alone; see that you pass the day sensibly."

The girl nods. She knows that to-morrow she will see none of the family, who will, each for himself or herself, pass the day in mourning for the dead. Ah, it is the most favorable combination of circumstances for that which she has before her. Once more she turns on the threshold and gives the invalid a long glance; then that too is over.

Hannah carries the presents downstairs and puts the basket on the table in Ditscha's room, saying: "Would to God, Miss Ditscha, that you had a good husband, and a family so large that you did not even have a chance to sit down! Do you know what? You are overwrought from simply being bored, and nothing else. In this way young ladies are worse off than we are, for we have no time for such like, since we must earn our few dollars so that we may live. There, don't be angry, Miss, you can't change the world."

She had lighted a lamp, and stood there for a while, her arms akimbo, waiting an answer. But as Ditscha remained silent, she sighed, shook her head, and departed, remarking that at Christmas time this was the worst house in the whole world.

Ditscha locked the door after her, for what she now did no one must see. She wrote letters, destroyed others, drew out drawers, opened cupboards. Her little writing-table began to look

very disorderly, papers burn in the stove, the room is filled with their smoke: the girl's face is crimson. When at length she has finished, it strikes three o'clock, and worn out, she throws herself on the bed, where she lies in a deep, leaden sleep until day-dawn, the unhappy day for her, the beginning of all the sorrow and misery of her life.

Christmas evening arrives; there is not a sound in the house, no happy excitement, no joyous children's voices, no smell of cake. No carriage brings guests, no messenger mysterious packages. The servants go about on tiptoes, none of the family is visible. In one of the front rooms, the so-called reception-room, Aunt Anna has taken a place in a chair which she has drawn up to the stove; she wears a black gown, and a black-bound book with gold letters lies on her knees. She is firmly convinced that on this day some other terrible event will befall them; imagines her brother Joachim will lose his mind or have a stroke, and considers it her duty not to be far away.

How Aunt Clementine passes the day no one knows but Hannah, for the tower door is bolted.

Were what Ditscha has before her a good deed, one would say the angels in Heaven smoothed the way for her. Nothing disturbed her, nothing hindered her, no one asked for her; she can run to her unhappiness with the utmost ease.

At six o'clock in the evening she comes downstairs to the hall. She is in fur cap and cloak, on her arm the little bag that she always carries to church. All is silent as the grave around her. She hears only the rustling of her gown and the ticking of the clock. "Where—to? Where—to?" sounds in the young girl's ears as she passes by. She fancies, too, that she hears a sigh, which echoes alarmingly through the dark hall—perhaps the protecting spirit of the house. Shyly she looks around, but sees nothing, nothing that warns her.

Once more she looks back, then energetically opens the door. The storm tears it from her hand and bangs it behind her, the sound rings loudly through the whole building. Ditscha has always fancied that the gates of Paradise closed with just such a thunder-clap, when God banished mankind from thence forever; just so piercingly, so hopelessly, never to be opened, must it have closed behind them.

Uncle Joachim, who is pacing the room restlessly, hears it; Aunt Bertha too, but they take no further notice of it. The wife, with her reddened eyelids, only says: "Listen to the storm, Joachim!"

He nods, and continues his pacing. "At that time," he says finally, "at that time it was just such a stormy evening, Bertha."

"Yes, and the fine young oak was destroyed, Jo."

"*His* oak, Bertha. I planted it on the day he was born."

She sighs without looking at him.

"It would have been better if that day had never dawned for us, Bertha——"

"Ah, Jo, and yet it was so lovely."

"Yes, when I came into your room and heard his little voice—he had lungs like a trombone player and looked so red and wrinkled—I never had believed that a man could feel so, Bertha, so strangely—so—ah, I do not know how. And now—all gone, all gone!"

The woman on the sofa suffers terribly at such times, perhaps more than her husband, but still she tries to comfort him. "Joachim, I always think that perhaps he has been spared a great deal of suffering. Who knows what he might not have undergone had he lived? He was so tender-hearted, so easily wounded—only think, if he had made an unhappy marriage! The boy would have been simply ruined by a wife who was not suited to him—or some other trouble, something at which we two would have had to stand by in grief and sorrow, without being able to help him, something at which we would have been forced to say: 'Would that he had never been born!' Think of that, Joachim."

“Ah, child! you do not believe that yourself. The pastor tried to persuade you of this at the time. I heard it and it vexed me. That is pitiful consolation for old washerwomen and the like. At the time, you, too, would not hear it. I can see you now, how in despair you made him a sign to stop speaking. You sat there always listening, and thought the people would surely bring the poor boy, or at least his body. ‘He is not dead, pastor,’ you moaned, ‘it cannot be; do not rob me of all hope!’ God! if I were an artist I would paint this scene, Bertha, even to the smallest detail. You had a dark-blue gown on with a red collar, and your hair hung in confusion over your face because you kept running your hands through it; and you were so ghastly, your face so drawn, and all the people in the room, the bailiff, the doctor, the pastor, and the neighbors. Old Count Berkow, his godfather, and Karkower, the two Schlüchterns and old Calwarwisch——”

“And you stood by the stove as though you were petrified, Jo.”

“Yes, I thought it must be a dream, and I said to Frederick: ‘Shake me, fellow, I wish to wake.’”

“Oh, Jo! if I might have died instead.”

“Or I! You could have brought up the boy better than I.”

“Ah, Jo! he brought himself up. He was so sensible, so good——”

"Yes, yes; that he was," and the man burst into piteous, soft weeping.

"Come, Jo, come drink your grog," says she pleadingly.

"No, not to-day! No, I cannot!" He seats himself as though exhausted on the sofa beside her, and lays his head on her shoulder. "Ah, dear, why are we still here?" he sobs.

Thus they both sit brooding over their grief for their lost one. The howling of the storm outside has ceased, the holy night descends upon the reverently trembling earth; in all houses and huts reigns the peace of God except in this one, and the man weeps bitterly. And she, the quiet, early gray woman, holds him in her arms, and tears run softly down her cheeks.

Meanwhile, at her Christmas post, Aunt Anna nods, it is so quiet, so deathly quiet about her; then a single clear peal of a bell awakes her. Has she slept long? The book has fallen from her lap, the candle in front of the mirror almost burned down; one o'clock already? She looks around—one o'clock indeed! Shivering she leans further back in her chair, then she starts up. It was no dream. The bell, the front-door bell, is rung violently again.

Aunt Anna springs up—it is a sound which has not been heard in this house for a long time. She seizes the candle and rushes into the hall. Fred-

erick is just stumbling upstairs, still dressed, for the servants have been sitting together drinking punch, and runs to the door.

A telegraph messenger comes in, over his uniform a thick red shawl, probably a Christmas present from his wife, his trousers turned up, a stick in his hand, and red with cold.

"A telegram for the baron—sixteen *groschen*," he says, with a sly smile which leads one to fancy that he suspects the contents.

Aunt Anna tells him to wait, hurries to the sitting-room door, and knocks as though she would rouse the dead. "Jo! Bertha!" she cries, "A telegram!"

Then her brother's heavy tread approaches. He opens the door, and now all three stand trembling in dread of the contents of the telegram.

Joachim von Kronen tears open the envelope, his face twitches strangely. "A son!" he says softly.

Aunt Bertha folds her hands, her eyes are fixed on her husband's face.

"A son! Klaus has a son?" cries Aunt Anna. "Jo—Bertha—a son! O dear Heaven, what a Christmas present!"

Jo von Kronen collects himself first.

"And *to-day*," he says, "Bertha, *to-day*!"

"It is—it is strange, Joachim!"

Aunt Anna hurries to the bell, and when Fred-

erick enters she cries out: "A son is born to the Colonel, Frederick!"

The old man nods smilingly, and glances shyly at his master, but with trembling hand the baron hands him a coin, "for the messenger."

Now Aunt Anna runs out of the room crying something about Clementine and Ditscha; her high, happy voice rings through the whole house. The lamps are to be lighted in the reception-room, she commands, the servants are all to come upstairs, the baron has something to tell them; and now she rushes upstairs to waken Ditscha and Clementine.

Husband and wife are left alone; his tears are dried. "An heir for Beetzen," he says softly. But she now sobs unrestrainedly, bitterly; at this moment her pain is stronger than ever.

"Bertha, dear," he murmurs. "Why, Bertha dear!"

There is a stir in the house, it has suddenly become Christmas. Hannah has told the joyful news to Miss Clementine, who lay sleepless in her invalid chair, and the invalid's lips murmur a prayer of thanks. Frederick has lighted all the lamps in the reception-room; the servants assemble with excited faces, for they all know what has happened, and the happy news affects them all, especially the old ones. The baron says a few kind words to each, the mistress merely nods, with

tearful eyes. Only Aunt Anna, Ditscha and Hannah are missing.

Suddenly the latter rushes in, terribly pale. "Baron, Baroness—our Miss Ditscha—O God—O God—no!" She grasps at her throat as though what she had to say choked her. "Come upstairs quickly!" she finally gasps out.

Aunt Bertha, thinking the child is ill, hurries out of the room as fast as she can; the baron follows her. The door of Ditscha's room is wide open; within, a lamp burns on the table. Aunt Anna sits on a chair beside it, unnerved, trembling, a sheet of paper in one hand hanging at her side.

"What is it?" cries Joachim harshly. He is always angry when he is frightened.

"Shut the door!" says Aunt Anna. Hannah closes the door. Joachim tears the paper from his sister's hand, vexed at her manner, reads it, looks around the room as though seeking some one, and reads it again.

"Merciful God!" cried Aunt Bertha, staring at him, "she is gone. Joachim, she is gone; Jo, she is——"

"Gone!" says Aunt Anna. "Gone with him——"

"With whom? with——?"

"The scoundrel!" groans Joachim.

"Hans von Perthien?" stammers Mrs. von Kronen.

"Forgive me for acting independently, dear uncle, dear aunts," he reads in a faint, trembling voice. "I shall marry Hans von Perthien against your wishes. We will be married in Heligoland. If you can forgive me, do so. I am committing no sin, only fulfilling my duty, since I keep my plighted word.

"SOPHIE VON KRONEN."

"When did she go?" asked Joachim, as though the two women must know.

"Hannah surely saw her last."

Hannah is called in. She has no idea, she only knows that Miss Sophie wished to go to church this evening. At four o'clock, when Hannah brought her her tea, she was still there.

"She must have left Büchow by the five o'clock train," says Jo von Kronen, after an oppressive pause. "And now you must all be silent about the matter, the girl's future is at stake," he adds.

He deliberates for a moment. "Miss Ditscha pined for her father, and secretly left for Berlin," he says emphatically to Hannah, "and Miss Anna and I go there by the next train, you understand? We go there to offer our congratulations in person upon the birth of the boy. Go downstairs and tell that. Woe to him who believes anything else."

Mr. von Kronen has suddenly become the active, clear-headed man of former days. "At three forty-five a train goes to Hamburg," he continues,

"Frederick shall help me into my travelling clothes; Anna, get ready, you must accompany me. I will try to rescue the honor-forgetting creature, even at the edge of the precipice."

"She should be put in a reformatory," remarks Aunt Anna, the flush of anger on her cheeks.

"If she were mine I would cast her off," mutters Joachim, leaving the room. Aunt Bertha hurries after him, scarcely daring to say anything soothing. She is herself so upset, so shocked by the girl's flight, that she trembles nervously. "Good heavens, what one must go through with her!"

In silent haste the preparations for the journey are made. "Where, for Heaven's sake, will you look for her in Hamburg, Jo?" asks Aunt Bertha finally.

"In some hotel near the harbor, where else?" he replies. "I shall apply to the police. They do not think that we will start after them so soon, how can they get to Heligoland on Christmas? It is no regular marriage. I will catch the bird, and God help the scoundrel if he falls into my hands—I shall take my dog-whip with me."

Aunt Anna comes in her furs, with a look of deeply offended feminine dignity. "I should never have believed that I would be forced to undertake such a journey," she sighs. "God tries us heavily. Scarcely does he send a sunbeam when clouds follow, and such clouds!"

"Keep your remarks for another time, sister, and come, the carriage is here," Joachim interrupts. "Good-by, Bertha,—God knows when we will be back!"

In a few minutes his wife, who stands as though stunned, hears the crunching of the wheels on the gravel, and the horses start off at a sharp trot.

Aunt Bertha and Clementine scarcely ever see each other; the former, can bear as little as her husband to look upon this innocent cause of her son's death. To-day, in her boundless anxiety and confusion, she mounts the stairs and goes into her invalid sister-in-law's bedroom.

Clementine von Kronen is propped up in bed, her cheeks burning with fever, wringing her hands. She stares at the new-comer as though she were a ghost.

"Excuse me, Clementine," says the trembling woman. "I do not know what to do in my anxiety; is it not fearful? How could she treat us so?"

"Have you at last awakened from your grief?" is the stern reply. "Had you tried to open your sleeping eyes sooner a great misfortune would have been less likely to happen."

"For Heaven's sake, how am I to blame, Clementine?" Mrs. von Kronen has sunk helplessly upon the chair at the foot of the bed, and stares at her sister-in-law as though the latter were mad.

"You *alone* are to blame, you and Joachim!"

cries the invalid cuttingly. "You lived for the dead, and forgot the living. She longed for love, and found none with you, so she picked up from the mire the first thing that she fancied was love. I have feared for her for a long time, but what could I do, an invalid, a paralytic? If my brother Klaus demands his child and you cannot give her to him, it is your fault. God has taken much from you, yes! But you defy him, all that he gave you that was lovely and beautiful to heal your wounds you despised, or at most tolerated. Forgive me for speaking to you so, to-day of all other days, but—who knows when I will see you again, and it has been on my mind for a long time."

Breathing heavily she sinks back. Mrs. von Kronen has bowed her head beneath her accusing words, like piercing swords they go to her heart: "You lived for the dead and forgot the living!" How fearfully true it is, and how the flash of recognition pains her! "Clementine," she stammers, "you do not know the feelings of a mother who must give up her only child."

"To whom did you give him? To death!" cries the invalid. "You know he is safe, safe from all the soil and lowness of life—you have lost the child to whom you should have been a mother, and how have you lost her? Do you know to what a fate she has gone? Do you know how low she may sink? Whether it may not be so low that she

may never be able to raise herself again? And if you get her back, perhaps saved, still pure in body and soul, do you not believe that even this unsuccessful step will be an eternal disgrace to her? Do you think that her soul will ever free itself from the weight of this unhappy recollection?"

"Clementine, for God's sake! Ah, if it were only to-morrow!" sighs the tortured woman. "Clementine, say no more. I cannot hear it to-day—have pity!"

"And it has no object now," says the invalid indifferently, presses her handkerchief to her mouth and is silent. What a day! A day on which a new little star rises, prophetic of happiness, and a bright, resplendent one sinks from its height.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ELOPEMENT.

DITSCHA leaves Büchow on the passenger train punctually at five o'clock; as was agreed, she is to wait at O——, where she must change cars, for Hans von Perthien, who is to follow on the twelve o'clock express. Greta accompanies the young couple to Heligoland; she is to be present at the wedding, and thinks this highly romantic. She has made only one condition, that she may leave them the day before New Year's at the latest, as her own wedding occurs on the second of January, which is, of course, granted; she will not be needed then.

At eleven o'clock, Hans von Perthien is at the Büchow station. Of course he lied to old Mr. Calwarwisch and told him that he was going to Magdeburg at this hour, that he might have the use of his carriage. He can endure the hour of waiting, to travel with Ditscha so early in the day would not have been advisable. And then, too, he had to be present at the Christmas gift presentation in Uechte, a silly business; since no more nor less than thirteen grandchildren of the Calwarwisch couple are there, besides four married daughters and sons-

in-law, and at which ceremony all the usual performances, such as singing, petitions to Santa Claus, and great excitement go on. He received a very handsome meerschaum pipe with amber mouthpiece, and cigars, always very acceptable, especially when one has to pace up and down in an empty waiting-room which smells of stale beer and is cold and uncomfortable.

He orders a glass of punch, and engages in conversation with the barmaid. What he has before him does not trouble him in the least; the Beetzen people will see that everything goes off smoothly. Probably it will not even be necessary to go to Heligoland. To-morrow, Ditscha will be missed, her letters found, hurried pursuit, and then, three or four days later, the announcement of their engagement will appear in the papers.

He asks the cross, blond girl what she received for Christmas, and what the news is. But she is not disposed to be talkative, and after a couple of monosyllabic replies, disappears into the comfortable room behind the buffet. The lamps smoke, the stove smokes, it is absolutely unendurable.

Hans von Perthien resolves to walk up and down outside. He stands for a while in front of the lighted window of the telegraph office. Büchow has night service,—the estate of a well-known statesman lies near-by, and he has secured this.

The apparatus is working, the significant strip

of paper unwinds beneath the hands of the young operator. For whom are these signs? What do they mean? Suddenly the man cries, turning to the back of the room: "A messenger—in haste—for Beetzen!"

The inspector, who has been asleep on the sofa in the next room, comes in. The messenger stands there already, with anything but a pleased face. "An hour and a half in the winter night! Urgent necessity!" he murmurs. Hans von Perthien can even understand this murmur, for the ventilator in the window is half open.

Now the official says, laughing: "Courage, Claus, there will be a fine tip—that is good news. Or do you think you would not be glad if you had such an estate as Beetzen, and there was at last an heir for it?"

Hans von Perthien stands as though petrified. He sees the telegram written out, handed to the messenger, and the latter leave the room. He leans against the building as though stunned, takes off his hat, and draws his hand over his forehead.

What was that? Beetzen—an heir? Ditscha would not—the devil! Certainty, certainty, at any price! But where to obtain it?

Then chance again comes to his aid. The inspector and the telegraph operator talk over the news, and the first, a jovial man, says: "Now the pretty Baroness Kronen's price sinks considerably.

Many a one would have been a suitor for the girl when Beetzen was part of the bargain. She will not be too agreeably surprised to get a little brother for a Christmas present." Then both laugh.

"You can get a ticket now, sir, the office is open," the man to whom Hans von Perthien had previously given his trunk says to him.

"Very good! When does the train leave?"

"In a quarter of an hour."

"For Magdeburg?"

"No, I thought you wanted to go to Hamburg, sir."

"Hamburg? Rubbish! I am going to Magdeburg."

"Oh, then I misunderstood you. There is no train for Magdeburg for a long time, or you can take the freight train—there is a third-class carriage—and catch the Cologne express at S——."

"Then the freight train by all means," says Hans von Perthien. "Get me a ticket and attend to the trunk. When does this train come?"

"In ten minutes, sir."

"Good," says Von Perthien. And ten minutes later he sits in the caboose, not another soul in it, and lights a cigar. "Good heavens," he mutters, "that was a close shave! The devil! how easily I might have been caught! Ditscha without Beetzen?" he whistles softly. "And now, I suppose, she sits waiting at O——, poor little girl! But

I cannot help her. She must go home again. I will write her from Berlin—or no, perhaps not—and Calwarwisch too, who will also be rid of me now. A charming little thing, but to starve with her? The devil! But a young man must have luck.” And he takes the cigar, puffs it once or twice, fanning the smoke in his face, and nods contentedly. “Not at all bad cigars!”

Meanwhile, Ditscha sits patiently in the waiting room at O——, Greta beside her.

The remains of a supper stand before Greta. Greta in an elegant winter jacket, fur boa and feather hat; she is just drinking the last of her beer, sets the glass on the table noisily, and says: “Only ten minutes more and *he* will come. How tiresome such waiting is, especially at Christmas time; my only consolation is that other people are travelling, and missing their Christmas trees.”

“You would have preferred to remain at home, Greta? I am so sorry,” says Ditscha wearily. She has not pushed back her veil, and has turned her back to the light.

“Oh no, Miss Sophie, not at all, dear no!”

“But your *fiancé*?”

“He can amuse himself in Büchow. My parents think we have both gone to Magdeburg to visit his aunt, who is to leave us some money some day—it is very funny! If they knew about this, the old people—good gracious! And you must promise

me, miss, that however it turns out, you will not betray me to the master and mistresses, or else my parents would have seen the last of Beetzen—you will not, Miss Sophie?"

Ditscha sighs. "Certainly not, Greta."

"Train for Lüneburg, Harburg, Hamburg!" cries the sleepy porter.

Ditscha starts up and grasps her bag, but she feels how she trembles, and leans against a chair.

Greta encourages her, and grasps the half-fainting girl by the arm to lead her out. The train just dashes up to the platform. Greta examines all the compartments, a crowd of people alight to take the Hamburg train, piles of luggage suddenly block the platform.

"The other side of the station, train for Hamburg!" cries an official. Greta has left Ditscha, and pushes through the crowd in search: Hans von Perthien is not there! She calls something to Ditscha, and runs to the Hamburg train, he may have thought they were already in it. Ditscha follows her, her heart beating madly, and with the feeling that the earth must open before her at sight of him. At this moment she believes that she loves him,—she knows that she has burned her bridges behind her, she has only him in all the wide world.

Greta comes to meet her, quite breathless. "What shall we do—he has not come!"

"Not come——"

"No, miss, he probably missed the train. Hurry a little, they are closing the carriages."

"I shall not go without him," declares Ditscha, turning toward the waiting-room.

"But—good gracious—how—what—? He will surely be on the next train."

"I shall not go to Hamburg without him; we will wait here," says Ditscha, and she turns to an official. "When does the next train from Magdeburg arrive?"

"Four-fifty!" replies the man, and Ditscha calmly returns to the waiting-room, followed by the discontented-looking Greta. As though one could not await the unpunctual *fiancé*—a fine *fiancé*, she would not allow such a thing with hers—comfortably in a Hamburg hotel, instead of in this horrid station, with its smoky dining-room, and on Christmas night!

Greta does not look at the pale Ditscha, but leans back on the sofa and closes her eyes. Behind the lunch counter the sleepy waitress nods. The regulator over the sofa swings its great brass pendulum as noiselessly as any phantom clock, the gas is turned low, and whistles softly, and Ditscha tortures her brain for reasons why he has not come. She wonders if there has been an accident, and pictures a scene on the road, a broken carriage, a man thrown out, a fallen horse—or he was not able

to get away at once from the Christmas festivities at Uechte—yes, of course.

When she took leave of him yesterday, he whispered: "We part to-day for the last time, Ditscha." And she is quite reassured. They will arrive a few hours later in Hamburg, and what does it matter? And her thoughts wander on—when will they find my letters at Beetzen? And who? And how will it be? She imagines it all, a favorable and an angry reception. They might have spared themselves and her; she would certainly have preferred to be married in the Beetzen church, in the presence of the family, than so alone in Heligoland. Now and then she glances at the clock. Good Heavens, how slowly time passes, and how very weary she is!

Suddenly she starts up, she has slept.

"Train for Lüneburg, Harburg, Hamburg!"

Greta too starts up, almost dazed with sleep, they both rush out on the platform.

The train slowly passes them, they gaze into the lighted carriages; why is he not at the window? Suddenly Greta cries out:

"Good gracious, miss, the baron—your uncle and Miss Anna! Mercy, they have come after us—Miss Sophie—don't betray me!"

And before the stunned Ditscha knows how it happens Greta has left her side, and she stands alone under a flickering lantern, near the luggage,

incapable of moving, and sees Uncle Jo and Aunt Anna. Not perceiving her, the two hurry directly toward her, on their way to the other side of the station.

Ditscha feels that the power to stand upright threatens to leave her. She grasps at the lamp-post, and at this moment Aunt Anna sees her.

"Jo!" she cries, "Jo!" He has gone ahead, and now turns. Then he sees in his sister's arms her whom they are seeking, pale as death, with half-closed eyes, and the next moment he stands beside her, grasps her by the shoulder, and rage overpowers him.

"Where is the scoundrel?" he asks. "Tell where he is, tell me at once!"

Ditscha has come to herself, and angrily frees herself from him. "I know of no rascal," says she firmly, and gazes directly into Jo von Kronen's bloodshot eyes.

"Jo," says Aunt Anna softly, "for God's sake no scene here!"

"I ask you for the last time," whispers the excited man threateningly, "where has your lover fled—the truth, the truth alone can save you."

"I do not know—I do not."

"Was he not here?"

"No. I am expecting him——"

"Indeed! It will be seen whether you are speaking the truth—Anna, stay with her. I will look."

He rushes to the Hamburg train, which is still standing in the station: he looks into all the carriages, asks the porter if a gentleman of such and such an appearance had gotten in. But the train is almost empty, and the few occupants do not resemble Mr. von Perthien.

He comes back out of breath. "He will be found," says he threateningly. "And now, walk up and down here. I will get tickets for Berlin. Do not enter the waiting-room; there might be some one there who knows us, and would wonder that Joachim von Kronen is obliged to hunt for his niece on Christmas night in a railway station."

Ditscha staggers along at Aunt Anna's side, but she does not go far, her feet soon refuse their service. They stand there together, in a windy, dark part of the station-garden, under an acacia, against the trunk of which Ditscha leans. Aunt Anna shivers with cold, and changes from one foot to the other. Ditscha does not notice the cold, she only feels that she is betrayed, disgraced, crushed. Aunt Anna has a torrent of reproaches on her lips, but she is so excited that she can scarcely speak coherently.

She merely gasps out: "And you—you a von Kronen? You belong to us? You have disgraced us all, all! What were you thinking of? Have you no spark of religion and morality?"

When at last they sit in a first-class coupé—Uncle Joachim has tipped the porter that they may be left alone—he cries to Ditscha again: “Out with it, where is the rascal?”

Ditscha shrugs her shoulders, she cannot speak. Her face is ghastly, the blue rings under her eyes are half-way down on her cheeks.

“I tell you—speak!” storms the angry man. “Where is he? Who was your ally? The truth, if I am to save you and your honor, the truth!”

“That such a thing should befall us, Jo!” sobs Aunt Anna, as Ditscha stares past her uncle, “that one of our family should secretly run off with a man!”

“Run off?” thunders Jo von Kronen, “the scoundrel let her wait for him—you see he declined such a—a——”

Suddenly Ditscha clutches at her temples with both hands, her gaze wanders desperately around the compartment, and then all at once she springs up, pulls down the window, and leans far out to open the door—she will throw herself out, will die, she can live no longer—she——

At that moment Joachim von Kronen seizes her around the waist, pulls her back and throws her on the seat. The door is open, the cold wind and a few scattering snowflakes blow into the coupé.

His face is ashy, his eyes rest in mad fear on the

young girl's pale, lifeless face. "Ditscha! Ditscha!" he cries, "be sensible! You can imagine that I am furious at your stupidity—wake up, Ditscha, wake up!"

But the girl does not near—she has swooned.

CHAPTER IX.

SIX YEARS LATER.

YEARS have passed.

The lindens are in blossom in the garden of Beetzen manor. On the terrace sits Ditscha, near her a table, upon which the untouched cups adorned with the Kronen coat-of-arms await the master of the house; a child's cup is there, and her own; fresh rolls, butter, and honey complete the tea.

A couple of wasps buzz about. It is very warm, and fleecy white clouds are piled up in the dark blue sky; a genuine summer afternoon. The door into the dining-room is open, and just then the large clock is heard striking half-past three.

Ditscha drops her work, lets her hands fall in her lap, leans her head back, and closes her eyes. A half-hour yet before Uncle Jo and the little one will appear. She is in deep mourning; Ditscha has not been out of mourning in all these years, and they are six. She thinks of this as she glances at the light embroidery, which stands out in fairly dazzling contrast to the deep black of her gown now as a sunbeam falls upon it.

First, immediately after she committed the

great folly of her life, Aunt Clementine died. Over Ditscha's face, which has changed very little, except for a mournful look about the mouth, a pallor creeps at this recollection. She frankly admits to herself that she was the cause of the invalid's sudden death, although they have tried to persuade her to the contrary. Oh, Ditscha has passed through a fearful period,—she cannot think of it without feeling once more all the misery, the degradation of the situation at that time. Since that moment in the train, Uncle Joachim has, to be sure, never spoken a word about the affair, told her father nothing about it, and energetically forbade Aunt Anna to relate the most insignificant fact concerning it, to whomsoever it might be. They dragged her, half-dead, to the cradle of her new-born brother, and the next day set off for Beetzen again with her. The only impression that the child made upon her was the feeling that now she was wholly superfluous in the world.

Arrived at Beetzen again, Greta Busch gave her a letter from Hans. She took it, tore it into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the winds before Greta's eyes, bowed haughtily to her, and turned her back without a word, leaving Greta, who had hoped for much money and a wedding present for her trouble, in a very bitter frame of mind.

Aunt Bertha gazed at Ditscha with mingled

surprise and horror; Hannah was mortally offended, and for a long time did not know how to treat her. Only Aunt Clementine, at whose bedside the girl knelt in silent grief, wept over her. "O my poor child, my poor child!" But she could not speak of the matter even to her; it seemed to her, when she wished to make the attempt, that a single cry, would leave her lips, a despairing, piercing cry, which would wound her own and the other's heart.

Only when Clementine's sufferings were over, when Ditscha stood by the coffin, and Hannah, with a shake of her head, left her alone with the dead, only then, kneeling and pressing her forehead to the wood of the coffin, did she find tears and words of heart-breaking grief, and questions, a confession which did not relieve her heart, only made it more bitter. Her youth was gone, gone! She hoped for nothing, felt nothing more; she lived on in quiet Beetzen without missing anything, in utter seclusion, without sun and light.

Then came the great war. Ditscha breathed anew; on her knees she begged to be taken to France as sick-nurse—in vain! Aunt Anna took the post as head of a large hospital near the German boundaries. Ditscha remained with uncle and aunt, knit socks and made shirts for the soldiers in the field, patiently read the paper from A to Z to Uncle Joachim, and followed on the map the

advance of the victorious army. At that time her stepmother and little Joachim von Kronen came to the house, the former a nervous, sighing, impatient, affected little woman, who made one or two scenes of weeping each day, read many novels, and told her fine boy of his poor, poor papa, who would never come back, surely would never come back, nor Uncle Reeden either. Then the tears and lamentations began afresh, and the tormented child, at that time three years old, screamed as though on needles; Ditscha standing by with her pale face, not knowing what to say.

Mrs. Cilly von Kronen was right in the chief matter. On a fearfully hot summer day the news arrived of the death of her husband; he fell at Mars-la-Tour.

Ditscha was now an orphan indeed, but no one thought of her. All sympathy was concentrated upon the very young widow and her little son. Even Aunt Bertha roused from her intense reserve which she displayed to the little fellow, and, weeping, clasped the child in her arms; for Joachim sat for hours with the young widow, who gave herself up to despair; finally he started to bring back his brother's body.

When he returned with his brother's mortal remains, accompanied by his wounded adjutant, Mrs. Cilly had so far recovered as to receive Mr. von Reeden. A widow's cap on her light blond

hair, draped wholly in trailing black crape, from which her childish face rose like a delicate apple-blossom, she awaited him in the reception room. Ditscha, the child in her arms, stood behind her chair.

Mr. von Reeden carried one arm in a sling. He was a tall, handsome man, whose young face twitched with emotion, repressed but with difficulty, as he kissed the hand of his commander's widow.

"Oh, Ditscha, may I introduce Mr. von Reeden to you? Mr. von Reeden, this is my poor dead husband's daughter."

Mr. von Reeden bowed deeply, then sank down on a little stool before Mrs. Cilly, who now held the child on her lap; it looked almost as though he were kneeling before her. Then came the account of his colonel's death, and his last messages. They were for "my wife, my poor little wife," and "the sweet boy." Bitter tears ran down Cilly's white cheeks: Ditscha stood there, her arms hanging limply, her hands clutching the folds of her gown, and waited for her father's last greeting. But Mr. von Reeden said nothing about it; Mrs. Cilly spoke a long time, in a low tone, of the narrator's own wound. Then Ditscha turned to go, an icy, bitter feeling in her heart.

Not even in his last hour had he thought of her.

The day of the funeral she remembers distinctly

to-day. All of them cried, but she did not—not at the touching words of the pastor, not at the despairing outbursts of grief of the young widow, or the few tears which ran down Uncle Jo's silvery beard: not when the doors of the vault closed upon Klaus von Kronen's mortal remains, not even at the words of comfort from the numerous people present at the funeral. For this sad ceremony the entire nobility of the neighborhood had assembled at old Beetzen, and if Joachim von Kronen ever had believed that he was stricken from the numbers of the living, he was mistaken. All were there, all.

No, Ditscha did not weep then; only when she was alone in the night she gave way to wild pain, but it was not mourning, it was her lonely tortured heart which accused the dead for not having loved her better, that she might now mourn for him as she should and would have.

Cilly remained at Beetzen, and, when time had alleviated her grief, brought life into the house, to the sorrow of Bertha, who now began to fail and whose eyes were oftener than ever red with weeping. From little Joachim—who was called Achim, to distinguish him from his uncle—she fled to the most secluded corner of her own rooms, when he ran through the corridors of the quiet house with his nurse and dogs. The more the boy developed, the more he showed the Von

Kronen dark complexion and coloring, the more anxiously did she avoid him. She pined away in grief for the dead.

Gradually the fresh boy, whom his mother wholly spoiled, grew deeper and deeper into Uncle Joachim's heart, but in his poor wife's presence he ventured no caresses. The two Joachims carried on a tender intercourse quite secretly; slyly they crept into the stables, as years before Uncle Jo had with his own son, and the old man raised the boy on a horse's back, and rejoiced when the little fellow sat there with cries of delight. And secretly the uncle had hunted out from his bookcase the building blocks of his drowned son, and had emptied them out on the floor of his study for his nephew, while he sat on the sofa, and watched with delight the same play that the former owner of the box had carried on. Just such tottering pyramids the little fellow in his black velvet suit built. Jo found him astonishingly like the dead in all his childish doings.

Aunt Bertha surprised him at this one day. Suddenly she appeared in the open door, stared at the child, stared at her husband, turned, and went away. From this day she spent most of the time in bed, pining with a slow fever. The doctor scarcely left the house, and toward Christmas, just when Cilly had begun to live again, and drove from one neighboring estate to another,

paying visits, and the first trunks of evening gowns began arriving from her French *modiste*, Aunt Bertha closed her weary eyes forever.

Ah yes, there have been changes at Beetzen Manor, great changes, but it remains cold and lonely for Ditscha forever.

A short time ago, Cilly, in elegant half-mourning, had driven to Count Mangëlsdorf's estate—there is to be a croquet party there. Ditscha was also invited, but had declined. Uncle Joachim is still sleeping, little Joachim is playing somewhere in the park with his *bonne*.

Ditscha is aroused from her reverie by the rapid rolling up of a carriage before the entrance. She rises, and gazes down the colonnade of climbing-rose-wreathed pillars at the vehicle. A stately man in faultless visiting costume springs out of the phaeton, and hands his card to Frederick, who brings it to Ditscha. She orders the guest to be taken into the house, and goes to fetch Uncle Joachim to the reception room. On the way she looks at the card.

CURT ROTHE.

Lieutenant of Reserves in the X Regiment,
Dombock.

Ah, yes, Dombock has been sold, the old count's estate sold to a commoner, and the new owner has come to make a neighborly call.

"How does the young fellow look, Ditscha?" asks Uncle Jo, gazing in the glass at his sleep-flushed cheeks, while he brushes his thin white hair. "You do not know? No matter, I shall see him myself in a moment. Perhaps an old man, eh? Some one who has grown rich on army contracts, and had the money to buy Dombock—well, I will come at once, at once."

Ditscha goes, and once more thinks how old Uncle Jo has grown since his wife's death. It has never struck her so forcibly as now, and still absorbed in this thought, she enters the cool, rather dark, reception-room, and stands opposite a man with blond hair and full beard, whose clear, intelligent eyes rest upon her with a look of unconcealed admiration. For a moment the two seem looking into each other's very soul.

Ditscha feels how she blushes. She asks him to sit down, explaining that her uncle will come immediately. She has lived in such seclusion, at this moment she wishes for Cilly's ability to start conversation. But nothing occurs to her save:

"How do you like Dombock?"

"I hope I shall like it very much, as yet I am not at home there. It is a fine estate, but it will need much work. The castle and park are almost too magnificent, too large for me, and I still long for my comfortable old home."

"Where is your home?" asks Ditscha, with a rare smile.

"In Silesia," says he, smiling also. "My older brother lives there with his family, and our dear old mother, who cannot be induced to leave there."

"And why should she?" asks Ditscha.

"Because I would so gladly have her here. Or do you think, Mrs. ——"

"Miss——" corrects Ditscha.

"Miss von Kronen—pardon—do you think it pleasant for a spoiled fellow, such as I am, to have nothing but empty rooms?"

"She will surely soon pay you a visit," says Ditscha, consolingly, and smiles again. And at this moment Uncle Joachim enters, so she leaves the two men together.

After a while, Uncle Joachim sends Frederick to say that Mr. Rothe will take tea with the family.

Ditscha orders another plate and cup, and herself draws up a wicker chair. Little Joachim appears in a blue sailor-suit, and just as Frederick brings the silver urn, the two men come out on the terrace. Ditscha sends the child to meet them, and asks if he may stay and drink his milk with them.

"But I beg that you will," is the polite answer, and Uncle Joachim hastens to tell that the poor little fellow lost his father in the war.

The gentlemen scorn cake, and smoke. Uncle Joachim is deeply interested to learn in what condition his guest found Dombock, and is pleased that the latter speaks with great reserve of his predecessor. He knows that Dombock had gone to rack and ruin, but does not like to hear his old friend, Count Amfeldt, blamed.

Tactful, he thinks, really tactful! when the young man even praises the forest. Then the horses attached to his carriage are admired.

"A fine pair of animals," says Uncle Jo, "they must go like the devil!"

"I brought them myself from Hungary," says Curt Rothe.

Then conversation turns upon travels. The guest has been everywhere; Ditscha listens with bowed head.

"Where were you during the campaign?" asks the host.

"Before Paris and in Orleans, Mr. von Kronen."

"And now we are to have peace?" nods the old man.

"God grant it—for a long time!" assents the guest. "Your grandson, baron?" he asks, glancing at the child, who has come up, and leans against his uncle's knee.

"No—I have no children—I——"

Ditscha gives Mr. Rothe a pleading glance, and lays her finger gently on her lips. "It is my little brother," she says aloud.

For a while they chat of various things, then the visitor departs. Uncle Joachim accompanies him down the steps, Ditscha stands by the flower-wreathed pillars, and gazes after the carriage until it disappears behind the thicket. The child has sprung to meet his uncle, who clasps his hand; both walk through the park, along the path gilded by the setting sun.

Ditscha passes her hand over her forehead. She feels so strangely, so happy. Was it the man's deep, warm voice, or his mild, grave manner? Or is it the delicious, quiet summer evening? She does not know, but she cannot prevent her thoughts from wandering to the lonely Dombock castle. She knows it. It lies yonder, just where the crooked Beetzen brook empties into the river. It is surrounded by magnificent old trees, and still has a moat and walls, as in the time of the thirty-years' war, which beautify it greatly; and she knows all the rooms, halls and corridors.

Yes, it must be lonely.

At supper that evening—Uncle Jo and she are alone—the old man says suddenly, "Ditscha, you must look at him more closely if he crosses your path again; he has the iron cross of the first class.

I saw it some time ago in the list—what do you say to that?"

It really does not surprise Ditscha she looks as though she would rather wonder if he did not have it, so she is silent.

"Cilly seems to make a practice of coming home late," continues Uncle Jo.

"I think they were invited to supper, Uncle."

"She ought to pay more attention to the boy," he adds vexedly, "I think she does not see him all day long. She sleeps until ten o'clock in the morning——"

"But Hannah takes very good care of him, uncle."

"Ah, nonsense, that is a mother's business! To be sure," he adds, "Hannah takes better care of him than Cilly, who treats him like a lap-dog. He must have a tutor, a tutor if all is to be well."

About ten o'clock that evening Madame Cilly returns. She comes into the room where Ditscha sits with her uncle. In summer uncle drinks his grog cold, with lemon-juice. He is at his third glass, and as the young woman flutters about in her embroidered white gown, trimmed with black velvet ribbons, calls him "brother," "dear uncle," and "grandpa," in one breath, throws a rose at his nose, and tastes his grog, making a charming little grimace, he laughs heartily.

"You had a merry time, eh?" he asks.

"A charming time, a delightful time, uncle. And if stupid old Franz had not stopped so ostentatiously in front of the door, and I had not known how anxious you are about your horses, Jo, I would have stayed a little longer; for, in the first place, an old friend of mine was there, and in the second place, quite a new one. The present owner of Dombock arrived, if you please—late enough, we were just going to supper—and you know, Joachim, whoever can buy Dombock is a person of some importance."

"Ha, ha! You could have seen him here. He drank tea with Ditscha and me," laughs the old man.

"Ah, really? Well, I can tell you, he did not stay there long, but long enough for all the ladies to find him interesting."

"Ditscha, have you more hot wa—I mean ice?" asks Uncle Joachim.

Hannah, who has just entered, cries, "Yes indeed, Baron!" and makes a sign to the ladies. Cilly laughs aloud, makes Uncle Joachim a court curtsy, holds her tiny little hand against his lips for him to kiss it, and vanishes through the doorway like a whirlwind. "Good-night, Uncle Joachim!" says Ditscha, gravely, and Hannah mixes the well-known fourth glass; then she, too, goes, and sends Frederick, that he may accompany the master to his bed-room, "for

more's the pity, the mistress can do so no more, not she."

"One thing is certain," Hannah begins in Ditscha's room, "it is not as if she were a widow at all; you are much more like one, and I am glad that you don't call her mamma, Miss Ditscha."

"Good Hannah," replies Ditscha, "I did so because father wished it, but she forbade it, and it is better so. I am as old as she, twenty-four."

"Twenty-four!" says Hannah, thoughtfully. "For a widow that is too young, and for a girl—just an age—O dear Miss Ditscha, if you would only stop worrying yourself over that old child-story."

Ditscha has paled, gives Hannah a haughty glance, and turns away. The old woman stands there in embarrassment, and secretly reproaches herself; how could she have alluded to that? She would gladly box her own ears. She tries to speak, stammers. She wishes to render Ditscha the usual little services with her toilet, but the girl suddenly vanishes into her bed-room and locks the door behind her.

Cursing herself, Hannah goes out.

A storm, such as she has never before known, rages in Ditscha's soul. For a moment she had forgotten, for one moment; now all that embitters her life is present to her consciousness again; the knowledge of the stain that poisons her existence,

the wounded pride, the burning shame. Terror, too, the terrible fear because there is some one who knows her secret, in whose power she is, who, if she chooses, can come forward and say: "Of whom are you speaking? Of Sophie von Kronen? Oh, yes; there is a fine little story about her; she wanted to run away with that gay young Perthien, but—on the way, her uncle fortunately caught her."

Ditscha groans aloud. Her thoughts wander to the go between in this secret love-comedy, to Greta Busch. She does not know where she is to be found, has never heard from her, nor seen her since she destroyed Hans von Perthien's last letter before her eyes. She only knows that she married and went away with her husband, and never entered Beetzen again. Father Busch is dead, old Mother Busch moved away from the lodge to the city, to Büchow, where her husband had married her thirty years before. New people live in the lodge at the entrance of the park, yet Ditscha cannot forget Greta Busch, can never pass the house without a pain in her heart. And to-day, now, the thought of the frivolous girl overcomes her more strongly than ever—why?

Before her eyes rises Dombock again, old Dombock amid the green lindens. What was it Aunt Clementine had said in her grief, when first she saw Ditscha after the catastrophe? "It will

always cling to you, child, forever; it will cling to you even if not another soul but you in all the world knows of it. You will feel it in your heart, gnawing and eating as long as you live? And may God grant, Ditscha, that you never meet the man whom you are destined to love, then the misery will be complete!"

And since then Ditscha's prayer has been: "Dear God, keep this misery from me. Never send me this one being whom I must love! I myself know and feel that I am pure—I erred, but I did not sin."

Until now God has heard her prayer, until now. And He will guard her for the future, surely He must! She clasps her hands and childishly prays that that one man may never——

In the midst she breaks off and stares before her for a long, long time, and when she at last comes to herself, she forgets to finish her prayer.

It is a strange summer at Beetzen, unusually gay. Of course, there can be no entertaining: six months after the death of the mistress of the house one cannot entertain. Mrs. Cilly von Kronen admits this to herself, but an occasional caller received in her own apartments, which are separated from Uncle Jo's in the left wing by the broad hall, can surely not cause her to be called heartless.

And so carriages daily roll up to the entrance. Light dresses flit over the lawn, gay hoops fly through the air, and the hard knock of croquet mallets reaches Ditscha's ears as she sits with uncle on the terrace, quite hidden by the blossoms of the climbing roses. Once, a single time, at the young widow's urgent request, she tried to mingle with the gay company, but she seemed to herself like a raven among song-birds, shy, embarrassed, awkward, and stole away as soon as she could.

With Uncle it was best,—what place had she among the happy people?

And then some one followed her, some one who laughingly said that with his wounded leg he did not feel quite equal to a game which demanded bodily activity, and would Baron and Miss von Kronen permit him to sit with them and rest a while?

As he joined them, and talked to the old man, Ditscha had begun her old prayer: "Send me no one whom I must love. God in Heaven, be merciful! Why she prayed just then she did not know.

That has often happened in the last weeks of August, and to-day too, this bright, warm September day, what will come of it?

Uncle Jo grumbles because Cilly has guests again. "He cannot walk about freely in his own garden. It is fortunate, Ditscha, that Aunt Anna

is at last able to come back to Beetzen." He adds: "She is highly necessary as chaperon, now that all the 'golden youth' of the neighborhood gather around Cilly, and she seems made for this sort of thing. Who all are here to-day again?"

"Cilly only mentioned the croquet club, and some guests of honor, Uncle," replies Ditscha.

"Ah, indeed! The Dombock owner is a guest of honor too, I suppose?"

Ditscha nods, and slowly a rosy flush rises to her face, but uncle does not notice it.

Under the lindens, near the large, closely cropped stretch of lawn, the coffee-tables are set. A company of some twelve persons has assembled there; one can hear the laughter and talking here on the terrace. Cilly's maid and a groom whom she has put in a strange costume with fantastic embroidery and full, white shirt-sleeves—she calls it "Hungarian"—are waiting. Cilly herself, in a cream-colored flannel gown, whose short skirt displays the prettiest little foot in a high-heeled patent-leather shoe, sits on a bench between Captain von Reeden, who has come specially from Berlin—he, too, is an honorary member—and Count Mangelsdorf, whose young wife is immensely amused at the way Cilly is teasing him. The charming hostess is just counting her guests. Aunt Anna chaperons the young ladies; she is enthroned at the upper end of the table, the per-

sonification of etiquette, in a black silk gown, the iron cross fastened on her left shoulder, and crochets.

"For heaven's sake," cries Cilly, "who is missing? We are only eleven."

"Bronnow!" cries the blond Countess Mangelsdorf.

"Yes, Bronnow! I wonder if he will come."

The two Misses von Schüchtern exchange glances; of course the countess has missed him for a long time.

"He did not send his regrets," says Cilly. "Let us hope he will come yet. It would be stupid if he should be missing just to-day."

The noise of an approaching carriage makes all eyes turn curiously to the drive on the other side of the lawn.

"It is not he," cries Cilly. "Those are the Dombock horses."

"Do you know the Dombock horses so well?" asks Mr. von Reeden, sarcastically.

"When I see them so often?" she replies, her blue eyes sparkling. She notices how vexed he looks, and is secretly highly pleased at this little sign of a jealous, passionate love. "I did not know that more than one or two days intervened between his visits," she continues, calmly, "and I am convinced that if he let the animals go alone, they would come to Beetzen. However, I doubt if

Lieutenant Rothe will replace our missing man; he does not like large companies, and even if he politely shows himself for a few moments, he——”

“He only goes so quickly to return the next day, or the day after, when he is sure that he need not share your society with twelve others,” the captain completes her sentence, and rises.

“*My society?*” she asks, drawing up her soft, long gloves, giving him a charming, roguish glance. “*My society?*”

A second carriage brings the longed-for Bronnow, who is received with acclamations. With him comes Curt Rothe. Cilly is right; he declines to engage in the game, begs that they will not put off beginning on his account, sits beside Aunt Anna for a moment, who condescends charmingly to him from the standpoint of a Canoness von Kronen, and asks him in what hospital he was cared for, of what na'ure his wound was, and whether the ball was found at once.

“Pardon, Miss von Kronen, my mother is with your brother and niece on the veranda. I must look after her.” A deep bow, and he goes—to Joachim and Ditscha.

Aunt Anna stares after him in amazement. What does this mean? He brings his mother here? Why? Matters look shockingly familiar.

Meanwhile an old lady sits on the terrace beside Ditscha, an old lady with such dear, pleasant eyes,

and such silver white hair, that she seems the very embodiment of sunshine. And this sunshine penetrates deep into a lonely, embittered, young heart, so that it almost seems as though spring had come to it, as though it might yet—yet be happy.

The “dear little mother” has come, and the tall, stately man gazes with emotion at the dainty old lady, who talks so pleasantly and unpretentiously, and even conquers Joachim von Kronen’s first surprise at this call. She has known this and that gentleman of Joachim’s time, and he had always said that if he were not from this part of the country he would like to be a Silesian. Suddenly, by accident, he learns that the old lady was born a Von Schneeblatt, and his maternal grandmother was also a Schneeblatt.

“A Freiin von Schneeblatt, of the Rawinsk branch?”

“Yes. Why then, deuce take it, we are a bit related.”

Now Frederick must bring the Almanach Gotha, and a terrible genealogical explanation goes on, while Curt Rothe draws somewhat nearer to Ditscha, and watches her trembling hands as she snatches up a bit of embroidery with perceptible haste—slender, beautiful hands, full of character.

They are both silent. When, after a little while, the old lady speaks of leaving, he agrees,

and the baron says he will show Mrs. Rothe the tree which his grandmother, born Von Schneeblatt, had planted in commemoration of some family event; so the carriage drives on ahead, and avoiding the croquet grounds, they walk along the shady paths, an occasional sunbeam falling upon their heads, while the first yellow leaves lie at their feet, the old couple in advance, Ditscha at Rothe's side.

The girl cannot take her eyes from the old lady; how daintily she trips along in her simple black silk gown, with her slightly old-fashioned wrap of the same handsome material. Through the black lace of her bonnet shines her silvery hair, and on her arm hangs her reticule of a long-forgotten style.

The young man notices her admiring glances and smiles.

"Now Dombock is homelike," he says, "and now, Miss von Kronen you can—no, you really must come over. I know the baron makes no visits—I know," he cuts off her rejoinder, "but you can surely come alone? Now that my mother is with me, you need not feel the slightest hesitation. The most scrupulous observer of etiquette would not venture——"

She stares at him in alarm; he misunderstands this glance.

"I understand perfectly," he continues. "I am

really decidedly opposed to the modern emancipation from our good old customs, and think that to-day, as much as in the past or far distant future, a woman should never pass a hair's breadth beyond the lines that etiquette prescribes for her. If my young sister were visiting me I should not ask you, but my mother, who fully takes the place of mistress of the house, you can call upon her, eh?"

"I am not pedantic," she says, for the sake of saying something.

"Oh, one must and should be, to a certain point," says he gravely. "You can safely submit to my opinion in the matter, for I am known as the most intolerant of men in such respects."

"If uncle allows," says she, with averted face.

He thinks her prudish, and she could weep for herself. There, just before her, rises from among the green trees the gardener's house to which she has so often gone secretly. A paralyzing shame overcomes her; she would like to cry: "What would you say if you knew?"

She has remained a few steps behind to get breath. As he turns, she looks so pale and changed that he asks if she is ill.

Silently she shakes her head.

The baron and the old lady have turned to the left, and now stand before the tree which the grandmother once planted. There is not much to be seen there. The linden, not a very fine speci-

men, beneath which is a stone bench, interests Ditscha to-day for the first time.

They walk toward the park entrance. Curt Rothe chats on. He has fitted up a library, and asks if Ditscha is fond of reading, and what she likes to read.

"I have always been strictly limited as to intellectual food. Aunt Anna locked up the library years ago, when she discovered that I read there sometimes; it has never yet been opened. Except his newspapers, Uncle Joachim reads absolutely nothing, and like all the others in the house, is of the opinion that reading does more harm than good," says she, and laughs while tears are in her eyes.

"Good heavens, what pedantry! It depends upon what one reads, and above all, how one reads," he cries indignantly. "It is most cruel, Miss Sophie——"

Then he breaks off. He does not wish to pain her, to point out even more plainly to her the poverty of her life, not now when he cannot quench her thirst, the thirst which speaks so plainly from each feature of her grave face, her sad, questioning eyes. So they walk silently past the gardener's lodge.

Ditscha does not even glance at the house. Recollections seem fairly to stun her to-day. At the park gate she gives him an ice-cold, trembling

hand, and half-unconsciously permits the old lady to take her tenderly in her arms and kiss her.

"Good-by!" say mother and son, and mechanically she repeats: "Good-by!"

It is after dinner. Ditscha dined alone with Uncle Joachim. Little Achim, who presumably had been over-fed with raspberry ice, and in consequence was naughty, had to be taken away by his *bonne*. His sobs and screams that he was angry with mamma because she loved uncle and aunt, who were visiting her, much more than him, still ring in Ditscha's ears. Uncle looks vexed, and, as usual, Ditscha reads the newspaper to him in the sitting-room.

He listens with evident abstraction; then he pushes away, with his ear-trumpet, the newspaper from which the girl is reading.

"Ditscha!"

She looks up in surprise, he speaks her name so peculiarly. "Ditscha," he begins hesitatingly, "I must speak of it some day, and for some time, since I have seen so much here which makes me reflect, I have felt the urgency—it concerns your future, child. What plans have you for your life after I am dead, and Cilly has full charge here? Of course you have a right to a home here in Beetzen, but will you feel happy here? You do not really harmonize with any of them, and——"

"Uncle," says she, alarmed, "do not speak of dying, please do not!"

"Yes, Ditscha, yes. Be so good as to tell me, what would you do? What would you plan?"

"If you wish it, I will tell you honestly, uncle, I would not stay here, I would seek an occupation, an object in life, work, so that I——"

"Now I should like to know what work you would do?" he interrupted. "Surely you would not hire out as housekeeper? Nor do you need to do so, you have money to live on."

"And if I had a million, uncle, I must do something; I cannot lead an idle life. I think, for instance, it would be so delightful to found a home for sick children. I—should like to be loved."

"Nonsense! Better marry!" he cries, and drinks his grog.

Ditscha gives him an imploring, reproachful glance.

He has become quite embarrassed and clears his throat. "Why, yes," he growls, "that is my opinion. And if some one comes along—of course, he must be a good fellow—then take him, even if he is no prince. Nowadays class distinctions are less and less marked, and you—" he stammers, takes a couple of vigorous puffs at his pipe, and, while she stares coldly at him, concludes: "you are a very sensible girl."

"I understand you, uncle. You mean—I can make no pretensions," says she very calmly.

"How so? What makes you think that?" says he, knocking out his pipe that he may avoid looking at her.

"I have never thought of marriage again, uncle, you know why," says she slowly. She feels that speech becomes difficult to her.

"What the devil are you talking about?" he thunders. "Are you alluding to that old affair with Perthien? Then confound it, if you are not deuced foolish! Do you think because a girl has not married her first love, that is an obstacle for the second? No sentimentality, I do beseech you! That you were on the point of committing a stupendous act of folly, you have probably realized for yourself since, and that you should thank God on your knees every day for saving you from this folly you probably also realize—well, and you wish to be an old maid now for this reason? Who knows the foolish story? Only we and that rascal; and who knows in what part of America he is? Therefore be so kind as not to look at me so sadly."

"Uncle," she begins. She tries to speak, to tell him of Greta Busch, something that she has wished to do a thousand times, but no sound leaves her lips.

"Well," says he, and draws his chair nearer to her and pats her hands, resting clasped in her lap.

"Well then, if it relieves your mind, I will say to the young man, when he comes to ask for you: 'You must not think that you are the first to court my niece, there was another whom she even loved a bit'——"

"No," cries Ditscha, "not loved! Oh no, do not tell him that, please, please!" And then she buries her burning face in her hands, and tears rush from her eyes, trickling between the slender fingers, while Joachim von Kronen lies back in his chair and laughs, laughs so loudly that the dogs beside the stove start up in alarm and come to him.

Ditscha springs up and tries to rush from the room, but the old man holds her fast by her gown, and draws her down on his knee.

"I tell you, Ditscha, an old fellow like me does not know how to discuss tender affairs of the heart. But you know what I mean, child, you understand? Nor can I know what the future will bring you, but I am a bit of a prophet, and it seems to me that there is something in the air. And now go to sleep, my girl, and sweet dreams. You are not vexed with me? You must put up with it, it is egotism. I should die happier if I knew you happy."

Ditscha goes sobbing from the room; she scarcely knows how she reaches her own. Had Uncle guessed her secret, a secret which she has

scarcely owned to herself yet? Or was he speaking in general? She throws herself on her bed and sobs on. Why did Uncle speak of the affair to-day as a bagatelle? And she had mourned her youth away under the heavy, oppressing weight of her guilt. If it was not guilt, if it were really but a childish folly, why had she been allowed to go on laboring under this delusion? Oh, and if *she* could make no pretensions, *he* could make the greatest; he should have no wife to whom even an appearance of blame was attached. Ah, that is the misery Aunt Clementine prophesied.

Suddenly she ceases weeping, and pushes her dishevelled hair from her forehead. She is not wicked, she is good, she is pure and—one does not condemn for a mistake. When he comes, when he comes the next time, she will tell him her story, before he has spoken a word of love to her. And then he can decide, then it will still be easy for him to draw back without attracting any notice.

And she? Ah, what will then become of her she cannot bear to dwell upon.

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT AND AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

THE family assembles as usual in the hall for prayers the next morning; only Cilly is absent. Uncle Joachim is vexed at this. Aunt Anna excuses her on the plea of headache, which the master of the house very ungallantly designates as rubbish. The air seems somewhat overcharged here in the house, although outdoors it is quite cool, and an autumn fog veils the wet branches of the trees. At breakfast, Joachim von Kronen makes some disapproving remarks about unconscientious mothers who leave the care of their children to flighty *bonnes* that they may amuse themselves, and lays beside Aunt Anna's cup a book, wet with dew and soiled, which Mademoiselle had forgotten yesterday in the park, where she was supposed to be playing with the child, a French novel of the newest school, which shocked even the master of the house, though far from prudish, as he casually turned the pages.

"Cilly cannot play the part of nurse," declared Aunt Anna, without noticing the book.

"Nurse, no. The boy is too large to need one; but she can have him with her, play with him, teach him, walk with him, instead of chasing after balls and such school-girl amusements."

"Uncle," begs Ditscha, "I would so gladly undertake such little duties with Achim. Shall I ask Cilly if in Mademoiselle's place I may——?"

"For heaven's sake mind your own affairs," cries Aunt Anna angrily. "Do you fancy that the child is to be dependent upon his elder sister's caprices? A fine bringing up that would be!"

"But I have such quantities of time," stammers Ditscha, "and I would be so happy——"

"Don't interfere, child," Uncle Joachim interrupts her sarcastically. "You must not be your brother's keeper, as yet he has a mother. For your 'quantities of time' occupation will yet be found."

"As yet nothing has happened to Achim," declares Aunt Anna, while her knitting-needles click furiously. "You are absurdly fond of the boy, my dear Jo."

"Yes, I am fond of him," says the old man in a low tone, "very fond; the last of our house, and naturally I should like to see him grow up to be an especially fine man. If there is one thing I beg of God it is that I may yet live to see his children. I should be very old, I know—I know—but I have reckoned it out, it is not impossible."

He draws out his handkerchief, blows his nose loudly, and rises to go to his room. Suddenly he comes back.

"What I wanted to say—the old lady at Dombock must have her call returned. I think you might drive over there this afternoon, eh?"

Cilly, who has just come in to wish the "dear old bear" the customary good-morning, and is looking charming in a white *negligé*, cries, "But she did not call on me!"

"Nor me either!" declares Aunt Anna, compressing her lips.

He gazes perplexedly at Ditscha, who, blushing crimson, has lowered her head.

"And once for all I make no calls," he declares crossly, "and if you, sister, are not willing to accompany Ditscha——"

"I find that quite unnecessary, Joachim. Ditscha can very well go alone; she has often enough before—I mean she is not wholly inexperienced."

"Ditscha," says Joachim von Kronen calmly, "your Aunt Anna is right, you can go alone; you are not one of those ordinary idiots who need to be watched. So—order the bays for four o'clock this afternoon and call on Mrs. Rothe in my place."

Ditscha hesitates a moment. A bitter smile curves her lips. Aunt Anna is always so; she

seizes every opportunity to humiliate her, to offend, to remind her of—oh, God!"

"Yes, Uncle," says she finally, rising, takes the key-basket, and adds that as she must go down-stairs she will give Franz the order herself.

As the door closes behind her Joachim says:

"It is not kind in you, Anna. You accompany Cilly to all the entertainments in the neighborhood, and yet Cilly is a married woman."

"Since when are you so fearfully anxious about Ditscha?" returns his sister. "I thought you knew that she is more than independent."

"Brother-in-law," cries Cilly, dancing over to him and laying her right hand on his shoulder, while with her left she pulls his beard, "Brother-in-law, you surely are not going to secure me a son-in-law? You really are encouraging the Rothes greatly."

"Don't talk such ridiculous nonsense!" cries Aunt Anna, angrily.

"Nonsense? How so?" asks Cilly, turning on her heel. "Good gracious, many a one would take him, if he is only a Rothe. You are really terribly mediæval. Anna, have you never heard that the so-called nobility of soul, according to the latest discoveries, stands above the nobility of birth? We learned that in all seriousness at boarding-school. No, no, joking aside," says she, with droll gravity; "the fresh, bracing wind of

modern times drives away the clouds from our noble Olympus, and the gods whose wings are stamped with a coat-of-arms, when they are put up at auction are bought in marriage by those without, and the reverse. Good heavens, it is a fortunate thing! This exclusiveness is gradually becoming monotonous, and I can tell you from my own experience, Jo, the handsomest, most elegant man I have ever known, and with whom I fell head over ears in love, was an Austrian lieutenant by the name of Pepi Pamperl, whose father was a tradesman in a suburb of Vienna."

"Why, then I will send Ditscha's possible suitor at once to you, if you are so tolerant," says he good-naturedly, and this time really leaves the room.

Scarcely has he reached his own room when there is a knock at the door, and Aunt Anna enters. Her face is crimson, and her voice trembles as she says: "It is to be hoped that you do not seriously intend allowing Ditscha to drive to Dombock?"

"Seriously, such is my intention!"

"But that is—the man might——"

"What man?"

"Rothe—might take it as encouragement, and afterward we would be blamed."

"Why so?"

"Ditscha surely does not wish to marry? I think——"

"Why should she not—if she chooses?" He lays down his newspaper and looks at his sister almost threateningly. "Is there any reason why she should not marry? If you are referring to that silly business of years ago, I tell you the poor thing has sufficiently atoned for that childish folly."

"In my eyes she is no better because her elopement was prevented."

Suddenly he strikes the desk with his fist so that the ink runs over and the writing utensils rattle.

"And that is your standpoint, you, who always emphasize it as 'Christian'!" he cries. "Would our Lord have spoken so, He who even forgave an adulteress? Devil take your old-maid morality, sister, I consider it sinful!"

She blinks a bit and has drawn back a few steps, but she says, "Who would want Sophie if he knew her story? And if you conceal it, you deceive."

At the close of this sentence she has reached the door and opens it. With proudly uplifted head, and the feeling that she has had the last word, she goes out.

The old man sits there, his clenched fist still resting on the desk. "O you poor girl," he murmurs, "how you must yet expiate your bit of youthful folly! And—and God knows, no man can find a better wife than she if he sought the whole world over."

Meanwhile, Ditscha has attended to her duties in the kitchen and storeroom; that is to say, she has discussed the meals for the day with cook, has gone into the storeroom with its long rows of boxes in company with Hannah, who, since the baroness' death, has attended to housekeeping so excellently that orders seem wholly unnecessary; but faithful old soul that she is, she has impressed upon Ditscha the necessity of supervision merely that the latter may have something to do. After this inspection the girl remarks casually:

"I am going to Dombock this afternoon, Hannah, and then to the city. Is there anything wanted?"

"You are going to Dombock!" cries the old woman. "Now that is right. The others are gadding about the whole day long, it is your turn. And yes, if you would, Miss Ditscha, my headache drops are all gone, if you happen to go past the apothecary's——"

"Yes, dear Hannah, willingly."

"And fifty pounds of sugar from Kopmann, and the milliner is making me a Sunday bonnet."

Ditscha nods. "I will attend to it all, Hannah." Then she goes upstairs.

After a while Hannah remembers something else she wishes from the city; she knocks at Ditscha's door and enters, but then pauses in astonishment on the threshold, for she has never

seen such a sight in this room. Ditscha has almost emptied her closet; her hats—there are three—lie on the table. She is just trying on one of them before the mirror, and looks quite in despair as she does so.

“Ah, Hannah, look! I have made no visits for an eternity, and now I have scarcely a respectable hat.”

“You see, you see,” says Hannah, “and whenever I have said, Miss, you should buy yourself a pretty new hat for church, you said, ‘Oh, Hannah, you do not understand, my black felt hat is a fine one.’”

“Yes, that is true,” admits Ditscha; “but I was caught out in the rain in it the other day when I drove to Birtzhagan with Uncle Jo, and the old lady looks so very neat and dainty.”

“Oh, no matter,” says Hannah seriously, “old ladies see badly, and as to the young gentleman he knows nothing about finery; he will like it if it looks tidy.”

Ditscha turns her back and examines the unfortunate felt hat very minutely.

“I would tie a veil over it, Miss Ditscha,” Hannah finally proposes.

“You are right,” says Ditscha, “that will do.”

“Yes; and then I wanted to tell you the damask weaver has not sent the towels yet. Will you inquire about them? It is possible one might need

them some time, although all the chests and boxes are crammed with such things. Well, I must go downstairs. Mademoiselle, flighty thing, has gotten a sore throat from reading out-doors in the damp yesterday, and who else is there to attend to the cold compresses?"

Ditscha is left alone, and a trifle ashamed, for in all her life she has never taken so much trouble with her toilet as to-day. Had Hannah noticed it? It is too foolish. She looks in the glass and shakes her head at herself.

About four o'clock the carriage drives up. Ditscha is not without company; her little brother escorts her. The child pleaded so long that Cilly allowed him, finally, to go, for in the first place Mademoiselle is ill and the boy a bother, and then he would be very much in the way should some one call, so she is glad to be rid of him.

Ditscha, in her simple black tailor-made gown, the dubious felt hat on her beautiful braids, gloves and shoes faultless, drives off, the blooming little boy at her side, accompanied by numerous kisses of the hand, and the old man's laughter. The air is wonderfully clear and fragrant, the hedges still red, the oaks green, and Ditscha hears the child's prattle as though in a dream. She has felt so strangely since yesterday, so calm, peaceful, and at the same time hopeful.

Uncle Jo had ordered Frederick to don his livery

and sit on the box beside Franz; the horses are resplendent in silver-trimmed harness, and, as far as their somewhat aged legs permit, they trot quite briskly. As the tower of Dombock becomes visible Ditscha rouses from her negligent attitude, her heart beats rapidly, she would prefer to say, "Franz, turn around." And she takes the little fellow's hand as though the child afforded her protection. But already they are driving down the avenue of huge oaks, and between two stone gateposts covered with the moss of ages, into the park. A few moments later they stop beneath the *porte cochère*. Frederick springs down and gives the approaching servant Ditscha's card, after asking if Mrs. Rothe is at home; and while Achim rejoices at sight of a huge mastiff who appears at an open window, Ditscha feels so terribly embarrassed that she prays that the mistress of the house may not be at home.

But hasty steps come through the house, and its owner receives the guests with radiant face. He lifts the boy from the carriage, offers Ditscha his hand, and in the large hall his mother comes to meet her at the foot of the stairs, looking quite as radiant as her son.

"We were just speaking of you," she cries. "Oh, how nice that you have brought the little one!—and you will let us have your carriage taken to the stable?"

Ditscha is about to decline, but Achim cries, "Oh, yes, Ditscha, please, please!" and goes upstairs, hand in hand with the old lady. After a while they all sit at the coffee-table and chat. Mrs. Rothe holds Ditscha's hand in hers, and strokes it tenderly, while Curt Rothe chats with the little fellow, who is deeply interested in the guns, the numerous pictures of horses, and the beautiful whips on the walls. The conversation is not deeply interesting,—the two young people speak least of all to each other, and yet both are happy, though neither knows that the other is.

He is an intelligent, simple man, with an enormous supply of common sense and nobility of nature. If there are men of whom one can say they are exaggeratedly honorable, he is one. He has never gambled, never had an unworthy love affair, and his opinion of women is the very highest. He fully believes that the best woman is the one the least spoken of, and it has always displeased him when one of his friends has dared to inquire at a *café* concerning his sister's health. He has fancied his future wife beautiful, intelligent, good, simple-minded, serious,—in short, like Ditscha, and he is now thirty-two years old, without having found this ideal realized until he found it here, here in his new home.

If he only knew if she could love him as he loves her.

How pleasant his study seems to-day—coffee was served there—how different from usual through the charm of her presence! And now, when the child comes over, and weary of questioning and eating, leans against her for a moment, he holds his hand to his eyes, as though the light of future happiness dazzled him.

“Come,” begs the boy, “show us the garden, Uncle Rothe.”

He rises, takes his hat from a deer’s antler, at which sign two terriers become wildly delighted.

“Will you stay with me?” his mother asks Ditscha.

“Oh, gladly.”

“No, Ditscha must come too; please, please, Ditscha!” cries the little tyrant, and his eyes are so distressed looking that Mrs. Rothe says she is sure the garden will interest Ditscha also, and brings her a shawl—Ditscha will excuse her if she remains upstairs, it is very cool outside.

The two young people and the child soon after walk through the garden. Ditscha knows it from of old; she had once, as a child, been in Dombock, a beautiful spot, whose oaks are famous far and near. The dogs skirmish in the wet grass to Achim’s delight; an intense, warm golden light breaks through the branches of the trees, and bathes Ditscha’s face in a rosy glow.

She walks silently along with bowed head; the

child has left her side and runs after a couple of butterflies.

"Let him go," says the man at her side, "he can come to no harm here in the park."

Finally Achim's voice reaches them from some distance; he is now chasing the dogs.

The two still walk on in silence. "It is beautiful here," says she at length, and pauses on a little mound adorned with a summer-house, from the windows of which one has an extensive view of the country, even to where the spires and roofs of Büchow rise from the trees.

"But very lonely," he replies gravely, coming near her; "and never did I feel the loneliness more than yesterday, when I came from Beetzen, from your pleasant home circle, and—I shall feel it still more keenly to-day after you have gone. I shall see you everywhere, see you standing here so plainly, but when I will come to your side then you will vanish like a shadow, and I—I shall seem to myself a fool."

She cannot answer, it is so strange what he says.

"A fool!" he says again, looking past her; and in fact I am one to speak thus to you. You do not understand me, cannot understand me?"

"No," she whispers, lowering her head.

"O Ditscha, do not deceive me. Do not deceive me at this moment," he begs. "Do not say that you do not understand me, it is not the truth; you

must have understood me, always, even from the day when we saw each other for the first time. It is not long ago, but long enough for one to understand his heart. Sophie, I will not ask you the great question of life too suddenly, only tell me whether you will permit me to woo you, that you are not wholly indifferent to me, for I love you and I must tell you so. I wished to write you, to-day, and your uncle; I wished to ask you both the same question: May I try? Then, when I had taken my resolution, as I seated myself at my desk, not knowing how to address you, you came yourself like a miracle, a lovely miracle. Ditscha, may I hope?"

She does not look at him; her whole form trembles. For a while both are so still that only the faint rustling of the oaks, and his deep, heavy breathing can be heard. Then, with a sudden movement, she holds out her hand to him.

"Yes," says she.

And as he stands there a moment, as though he could not understand the realization of his hopes, then takes her in his arms, she pushes him from her anxiously, her face as she bends her head back pale with terror.

"But—but——" she gasps. She tries to say: "One word—I will first confess to you—please hear me first," but no sound passes her lips.

"But——?" he asks. "No but, Ditscha! You

love me—yes or no? Yes? You do? And there is no ‘but’ in love, eh, Ditscha?”

“Uncle,” she stammers, still protesting.

“Do you think Uncle will say ‘no,’ Sophie?”

She shakes her head. “Speak with him,” she begs.

“He will not change matters in the least,” he replies, kissing her hands. “There is nothing in the world that can come between us, neither uncle’s nor any other person’s will—nothing! But if you wish it, it shall be so!”

She has drawn back a step, her arms hang limply at her sides, and she looks at him with weary, sad eyes. Will he think the same to-morrow as now, or will she have lost him after Uncle has told of her folly? She cannot do it herself, cannot if she were to die on the spot.

And suddenly, as though impelled by a terrible fear of losing him when she has scarcely found him, she throws her arms around his neck, and leaning her beautiful head against his cheek, she whispers, “Oh, I love you so! so dearly!” and she herself kisses him, shyly, hesitatingly, fleetingly, then rushes past him, and he hears her calling in an unsteady voice, “Achim! Achim!”

After a few minutes he finds her on her knees before the wild boy, who strokes her cheeks and asks, “Have you hurt yourself very much,

Ditscha?" For he thinks her tears flow because she has hit herself.

"No, no," says she; "but now come, we must go."

Ditscha does not know how she succeeds in attending to her commissions in Büchow. She sees herself in all kinds of shops, goes with Achim to the confectioner's and buys him candy, and when they come out of the highly primitive confectioner's, through the autumn fog shine the lights of the oil lanterns which still hang on long chains across the streets in the country.

Ditscha has ordered the carriage to wait at the apothecary's, where she will buy Hannah's headache drops, and now crosses the parade square—which proud name the unpaved market-place of Büchow bears—to the shop, except for the old stone court-house, the most pretentious building of the square. She is so absorbed in thought that she does not notice a lady leading a little girl by the hand, who passes her, stares in her face, and pauses to look after her. Then this gazer turns, goes after Ditscha, and near the apothecary's shop is overtaken by a rider, who trots so briskly across the market square that he almost runs over the fat little woman in the huge Rembrandt hat. He pays no further attention to her, gives his horse to hold to Frederick, who stands

beside the carriage, smilingly glances in at the shop window, then boldly walks in.

The little lady in the Rembrandt hat has noticed all this. She now stands in his place, and peers through the glass door; she sees how Ditscha starts, then smiles, so tenderly and happily, and how the boy jumps into his arms. The gentleman buys a bottle of cologne, then Ditscha comes out of the shop, goes close past the lady, and gets into the carriage with the little boy; the gentleman swings himself into his saddle, and riding beside Distcha they all disappear from sight.

Now the lady also goes into the shop and asks for ten cents' worth of peppermint drops, then says, apparently casually:

"Who were those people?"

"Miss von Kronen, of Beetzen, and her little brother."

"And the gentleman?"

The apothecary does not know, but a wheezing old woman, who sits, her basket beside her, on the dark mahogany bench, awaiting a large bottle of medicine which is just being sealed up with gilt paper, says, "That is the new owner of Dombock. The people in the village say he is courting the young baroness of Beetzen. Well, she can laugh, for he has money as plenty as hay."

"Oh, indeed!" says she of the Rembrandt hat, and taking her child by the hand, a little girl of

three, dressed entirely in bright scarlet cashmere, she leaves the shop, nodding very condescendingly to the apothecary.

In a narrow street, whose buildings are all slanting with age, and whose pavement is uneven enough to break one's neck, the lady enters a house, climbs with the child up a ladder-like staircase, and opens the door of a room. It is very poorly furnished, but neat, and the glass cupboard with the gilded cups is also there. Old Mother Busch sits beside the stove of her widow's retreat, and knits. The new-comer says to her, "Take off the child's things, mother, I want to write a few lines to my husband at once."

She throws off her mantle, but keeping on her hat, fetches pen and ink, and writes:

"DEAR ALFRED:

"I need only a little time, and then I will have it; do not worry. Look in the papers every day for the announcements of engagements, and if you find one from here, write at once. I will then go to Beetzen and offer my congratulations. I think, too, that eight hundred dollars are better than five hundred, and I will borrow that much; it will be no harder to repay it. Mother is well, and as to the child, the people stop on the street and exclaim how sweet she is. I cannot yet decide when I will return. Until then, love from

"YOUR GRETA."

She holds the letter over the lamp to dry the ink, and glances at the little girl, who, with hands on the table, standing on tiptoes, watches her mother's actions.

And indeed, a more ideally beautiful little creature, with her bright blond hair and almond-shaped eyes, cannot be imagined. "Egitt, Egitt, you are sweet enough to eat!" cries Greta Busch, now the wife of the "Spanish riding-school master," Brose, and she first kisses the child, then seals the envelope. "Now stay with grandmother, I am only going to the post-office; just wait, later I will buy you the handsomest doll in all Berlin, with the sweetest clothes, and then we will go to the zoological gardens, you sweet little puss."

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE JO'S MISTAKE.

THE following day Ditscha sits, ice-cold with anxiety and excitement, in her room, her hands tightly clasped, and waits—Curt Rothe is with her uncle.

He has come, without attracting notice, on horseback. Ditscha herself had not expected him so early, but she had plenty of time to prepare her uncle, and to ask him in a trembling voice to tell him all, all; to which he consents with, "Yes, indeed, child." For a moment the thought of Greta Busch flashes to her mind, but who knows where she is, or whether she is bad enough—in fact whether she will ever return. But she is silent concerning this former ally.

"Will he go?" she asks herself. "Will Uncle Jo send for her?"

In Uncle's room the conversation, which began with great solemnity, has become very hearty and cordial. Of course, Uncle Jo has declared that his niece had no fortune, for twenty thousand dollars nowadays—well—at least she will have a proper

outfit. Then he says he will miss her terribly, and honest tears come to his eyes; finally he assures Rothe that there is not a better soul in the world than Ditscha. "A little grave, you know, sad experiences—an orphan—our quiet, monotonous life, you understand:" and Curt Rothe declared that he would not have Ditscha different, and that it was just this gravity which had attracted him.

Uncle Joachim misses his pipe, which usually helps him over all embarrassment; he sits there and twirls his thumbs, while his brain is in a turmoil as to how best to tell of Ditscha's folly. Finally he rises, rings, and orders a bottle of Rhine wine, seats himself again, and comes to the conclusion: Why the devil should he know anything about it? What is the use of making such a fuss over the foolish, long-forgotten, childish story, such as all girls have, or if not—oh, well, let her tell him herself after they are married, and at an hour when they are mutually inclined to confessions. Good heavens! it would be a peculiar time now for me to say: "Your love was once on the point of eloping!" So, pleased with his resolution, he cries to Frederick, as the latter enters, "Ask Miss Sophie to come to me."

Meanwhile he leads the young man up to the family tree of the Kronens, which occupies almost the entire wall, and remarks:

"The first of us to marry outside of the nobility;

do not be vexed with me for mentioning this, for I add that I am pleased with my niece's choice, it is an honor to me."

"Baron," says Rothe, "our great Bismarck's mother was not of noble birth."

The old man laughs, slaps him on the shoulder, and says he should have no objections to such a result of the union of noble and citizen.

Then Ditscha comes. She looks pitifully. All her soul is in her eyes, which gaze upon her *fiancé* with a plea for pardon. And he smiles with emotion, his whole handsome face smiles, and putting his arm around her, he says:

"I will love and honor her as no woman has ever before been loved and honored, Baron."

Then they fill glasses and drink to a happy future, and tears rush to Joachim von Kronen's eyes again as he kisses Ditscha. Drawing out his handkerchief he leaves the room, murmuring something about Cilly and Anna.

The two are alone.

"Do you love me just as much as yesterday?" she asks softly.

But he does not understand. He is so supremely happy, he presses her to him, kisses her, drowning her words which he does not understand. And she weeps; suddenly she believes in the great, all-vanquishing, blessed power of love.

In the left wing of Beetzen Joachim's announce-

ment of the engagement falls like a bomb. Cilly laughs merrily. Aunt Anna is horrified, so horrified that she speaks of "insanity."

"What will become of *you*, Joachim, without the girl?" she asks.

"I shall not live forever, sister, and Ditscha did not come into the world for my express purpose."

Was it absolutely necessary then to marry?

"Certainly not; but when two people love each other and are suited——"

Had Jo spoken with the happy *fiancé*?—"happy" greatly emphasized.

"For two hours!"

And he was suited with everything?

"Perfectly," said he, inwardly furious at his sister's behavior.

"Only a man who was anxious to marry into the nobility would be."

"Indeed! And Cilly told me that any of our countesses would have taken him if he had given them the chance."

"Yes," says the young woman honestly. "I believe it, but—how did he happen to choose Sophie?"

"For the same reason that Klaus chose you."

She laughs again, and suddenly, deeply interested, asks when the wedding will take place.

"Probably soon."

"I shall go to my convent next month," declares Aunt Anna.

Uncle Joachim pretends not to hear.

"The couple will wish to see you——"

"I have a headache to-day," says she, rising.

"You cannot have a perpetual headache until you go to your convent retreat," cries Cilly, laughing. But Aunt Anna walks out of the room with head held proudly aloft.

"Then I suppose Uncle Jo must play the part of chaperon," says he. "Another reason for hastening the wedding. Are you coming to dinner, Cilly?"

"But, dearest Jo, I go to the Schüchterns to-day for a carp dinner. You know they fish on the lake to-day, and with their catch pay off all social obligations."

"Well, much pleasure then!"

To-day Uncle Jo dines alone with little Jo.

Ditscha drives to Dombock to tell the old lady of the engagement. She is quite alone, for her *fiancé* rides ahead, and besides, it would be quite contrary to etiquette for him to drive with her, since she has no one to chaperon her. Aunt Anna sees her get in and roll away, and sees her come back alone, but feels no compassion. Ditscha has driven off alone once before, to make much fuss about a chaperon for her now would be a farce.

Ditscha feels this treatment deeply; her heart is very heavy as she enters her quiet room that evening, and when Hannah appears with a bunch of monthly roses, violets, and myrtle, and bashfully but warmly congratulates her, she throws her arms around the faithful old woman in passionate excitement, and cries as though her heart would break.

This is the day of Ditscha's second engagement.

A few days later, Mrs. Rothe, in her comfortable room of Dombock Castle, writes to her youngest, recently married daughter:

"I can imagine how curious you are, dear children, to hear further particulars of Curt's engagement, and I perfectly understand, my little Anna, your astonishment at this sudden decision. You know better than any one else but me, what a high standard he requires in a woman, especially in her whom he would marry. Now, shall I write you how it happened, and above all, what impression his betrothed made upon me? From his first meeting with her he was charmed by her, nevertheless he struggled with uncertainty as to whether she would be the right one. He wrote to me, begged me to come, and I could only praise his choice when I learned to know the beautiful girl. But I confess that I had my doubts, in fact, as to whether her family would consent; whether she, the daughter of one of the oldest noble families of

this region, would be happy as the wife of a plain citizen land-owner. It is only the name, child, for in every other respect our boy can vie with princes—you understand me, my heart.

“He shared my fears, but lo and behold, one day—now a week ago—they became engaged, and twenty-four hours later the uncle, Joachim von Kronen, renowned for his great pride, gave his consent in the most cordial manner, and that very afternoon Sophie came to me at Dombock, announced by Curt, to receive a mother’s kiss, as she said. Strangely enough, she came alone. She seemed happy, yes, but quiet, and inclined to tears; she made some excuse—Jo von Kronen goes nowhere since he lost his son in such a terrible manner. Aunt Anna had a headache, and the young baroness was invited somewhere. God forgive me! I had a disagreeable feeling of being slighted, but Curt noticed nothing, or would notice nothing, and yet he is so sensitive in such respects.

“Now Curt is at Beetzen daily, and, I too, have driven there with him. The old man is uniformly cordial, he seems to love Ditscha dearly. I left my card for the two ladies before we went to dinner. It was a strange dinner, no one spoke of the engagement. I thought Joachim von Kronen would drink to the health of the young couple, but no indeed! The young baroness was pleasant and

lively, the aunt more than reserved; she left the table before dessert.

"After dinner, the marriage was fixed by Joachim von Kronen for the second of January: he would not like to be alone at Christmas time, he said, and Sophie kissed his hand thankfully. There is something remarkably humble about her, something not at all in keeping with her proud appearance; she treats Curt in the same way, but she is a dear, good girl, you will like her.

"I expect her here again to-day; she wishes to discuss her trousseau with me, since she has no mother, as she sadly said. The wedding is to be very small and quiet, the Kronens are still in mourning. Curt has agreed; he thinks they can celebrate afterward with all of you, when Sophie is his wife. I think so, too.

"I have just heard a carriage drive up; she has come."

Immediately after, Ditscha comes into the old lady's room. She is very happy, one can see it by her shining eyes, and she leans tenderly against the lovable old lady, as though she would make up for the love she has missed all these long years.

Curt is not at home, he is hunting. She knows it, and has come to discuss with his mother all possible details of trousseau and house furnishings.

As they sit at tea, Ditscha tells that uncle has made her a fine present of linen and damask.

Hannah has selected it, the chests are full of it at Beetzen. And besides, Uncle has given her twelve thousand marks for his wedding present, to furnish Ditscha's room. "But we wish to select the furniture together, Curt and I, little mother, and so we must go to Berlin," she adds.

"But, you foolish children, you cannot go to Berlin *alone*," says Mrs. Rothe; "and a feeble old woman like me can not travel."

A shade falls on Ditscha's face.

"Cilly would go," she remarks, "but Uncle will not consent; he says it is not to be thought of, she is not a suitable chaperon, and Aunt Anna declines. Besides, I do not want to go with her—ah, dear mother, can you not go?"

"Little daughter, I will try," says the old lady consolingly; she is sorry for the poor child—how slightlying she is treated! "But then wait until I am on my way home, until Advent, eh?"

"Certainly," says Ditscha happily, "and we can make our plans and—think it all over in the mean time."

Later, they go through all the rooms, and Ditscha decides what purpose they shall serve: then she goes alone into Curt's room, and seating herself in the chair before his writing-desk, strokes caressingly the wood which his hand has touched, kisses his penholder, and lays a last pale rose she has worn in her belt, on the blotting-paper of the port-

folio, writing in tiny letters beneath with a blue pencil lying near, "Your happy Ditscha greets you!"

As she drives home, she leans back in the carriage with a great feeling of happiness in her heart, increased by Uncle's kindness, the old lady's love, and the consciousness of a happy future awaiting her. She has never before felt like this; if she had a voice she would like to sing something gay, a jodel, such as the Alpine peasants send down into the valleys. She must do something; what shall it be? Something so that God may know the happiness of her heart. She resolves secretly to pay for lame Margaret, the poor tailor's sewing-machine, which she is purchasing on instalments: she has barely succeeded in paying the first, and Ditscha enjoys thinking how the pale creature will marvel when Gerlach, the Büchow merchant, will not take from her the money which she will bring who knows when? Ditscha can easily spare a hundred marks from her trousseau money.

Uncle Jo stands at the window as she returns; beside him the child presses his rosy face against the panes. She nods and waves to them. How they enjoy it! Ah, those two will miss her sadly, and that, too, is a sweet feeling which she now experiences for the first time. She hurries up the front steps and is about to go as quickly into Uncle's

room, when Hannah, leaning over the banisters, calls:

"Miss Ditscha, Miss Ditscha, there is some one in the servants' parlor who wishes to speak to you." And as Ditscha listens in astonishment, she says: "Yes, you will wonder, Miss, it is Greta Busch, or, as she is now called, Mrs. Brose."

"Greta Busch?" Ditscha repeats slowly.

"Yes, she has been waiting for three hours, and has been pouring into my ears how badly off she is. She is at her mother's with one child, and her husband has the other," says Hannah, coming downstairs.

"Then send her upstairs," says Ditscha, and goes up to her own room. She feels as though the sunlight, just before so radiant, had now wholly vanished from her world. She takes off cloak and hat, and stands in the middle of the room, her lips compressed, when there is a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she cries. A little, corpulent woman, quite poorly dressed, comes in. No Rembrandt hat, no plush jacket, all very simple and unfashionable, although ladylike: a plain felt hat with bows of ribbon that must have been often ironed, a plain shawl over her shoulders, a fine change of attire; only the face, the puffy, bold face is genuine, and is that of a person who is up until all hours of the night, and daily uses paint and powder. The flabby, heavy features signify ir-

regular habits of life, in fact dissipated ones, although the eyes try to look very meek and modest.

"Does Miss von Kronen recognize me?" she begins.

"I should scarcely have recognized you," says Ditscha. "What do you wish of me, Mrs. Brose?"

"Oh, Miss, why do you not call me Greta. It pains me?"

"What do you wish?" Ditscha asks again.

"First of all, I longed to see Miss von Kronen again: there has not been a day nor a night in which I have not thought of you, and when I read of the engagement—my husband"—here Greta sighs deeply—"sent me the newspaper that had in it the announcement of the engagement from Berlin. I said to my old mother, 'I must go over and congratulate Miss Ditscha,' and I now do it heartily, and for mother too; and I thought I might ask if Miss Ditscha had any work for me. With such a large outfit there must be all kinds of work. Miss Ditscha, I do ask you for it very earnestly,"—here Greta hunts for her handkerchief, and draws down her face as though about to cry—"for I am bitterly in want, Miss."

Ditscha's nature is so truly noble that the woman's sobs do not for a moment seem ungenuine to her.

"I am very sorry," she says. "I will speak to

Hannah, something can be found; perhaps you can hem towels?"

"Oh, gladly, gladly, Miss, anything that you have, only so I may not be an absolute burden to mother, with my little one."

"How many children have you then?"

"Two—but that is too many when the husband earns nothing."

"And how does that happen?"

"O God! O God!" begins Greta. "He had such great misfortune with two horses, soon after each other: one fell on the street and had to be shot on the spot, and the other in the cir—I mean the riding school, and he must pay for both, because the master says it was his fault. Miss Sophie, how is he to blame if a boy frightens a horse with torpedoes, and what fault of his is it that the other was a balky beast, and would not obey, so that he had to whip it, and then it reared and fell with him, and lay dead on the spot where it fell? The first is paid for, we had saved that much money—three thousand marks, Miss Ditscha, the beast cost, and the other seventeen hundred marks. But he cannot pay that now, so the master sold our things, and gave my husband a bad testimonial, and now, just when we thought we could make ourselves independent——"

"I am very sorry," says Ditscha.

"And now he is looking for a new place," con-

tinues Greta, "and meanwhile the baby and I are with mother; he kept the boy, I cannot burden the old woman with two children. Oh, Miss, if you could help me with work."

"I think I may promise that," says Ditscha, and rings; "be patient for a moment." When a maid enters, she tells her to send Hannah, and when the resolute little woman appears, Ditscha tells her of Greta's application.

"A—h!" says Hannah slowly, "can you do anything? Embroider monograms, and such like? For you know, any one who does not understand fine work, and only plays at it, does not get a piece of the Beetzen outfit into her hands."

Greta enumerates her accomplishments; she can fell, and do embroidery, and presents for examination a sample towel she had brought with her: this time at least she does not lie.

"Well then, come with me. I will try you," says Hannah, "and give you a couple dozen napkins."

Greta curtsies to Ditscha and goes.

In spite of her feeling of repulsion, Ditscha is sorry for the woman, she asked so meekly, and made no allusion to former times. She calls after her: "If you happen to need a few marks, Greta?"

"Oh, no indeed, Miss, I thank you," says she, and her sallow face really flushes. Ditscha thinks

it shame, and excuses herself, and Greta and Hannah vanish.

In the linen-room Greta bemoans the heavy bundle, and that mother's room is so small, how would it be if she were to sew here? And will not Hannah propose to Miss von Kronen, if the work is satisfactory, that she, Greta, might sit here in the sewing-room and work? Probably a place might be found for herself and the child to sleep.

Hannah, who never could tolerate Greta Busch, grumbles: "Well, well, that I cannot say. Here are a dozen napkins, it will surely not kill you to carry them, and when they are finished you will get some more."

At supper, Ditscha is more quiet and absent than for a long time, so that the old man asks her if they have had a lover's quarrel. She smiles and says "no," but in the night old recollections come over her with terrible force, so that she does not close her eyes, and looks quite miserable the next morning.

And the days pass, he comes every day. More and more she realizes the deep, true love of his heart: it is an ardent passion allied with the most reverent adoration, so chivalrous, so tender, and—so easily wounded. He is even vexed when rough Uncle Jo asks Ditscha teasingly: "How many kisses were there to-day? Did you count them?"

Are there any left for your old uncle?" And he cannot understand that Ditscha does not feel offended by these remarks.

"But, Curt, the old man is like my father."

"I do not like to have jokes made over such things which are sacred to me," he says.

"But Curt—the kisses——"

"Are sacred kisses to me," he persists, "as you are sacred to me, and as our relation is."

"You dear idealist," she says tenderly.

"Why, Ditscha, are you smiling? Please do not, it affects me painfully. I cannot understand joking about such matters. And you do not either, eh, Ditscha?" he continues. "You would never be able to laugh at a flippant speech, never! or find an improper glance amusing? You see, Sophie, in this I am not normal. For instance, I would never be jealous. So you need not fear Othello scenes, but I should not understand you, should feel uncertain of you, and, finally, would be unable to respect you longer, and that, dearest, is worse than to know you dead."

Then he kisses her, and strokes her silky hair as a mother might.

"Ah, my heart, my queen, why do I say all this to you, you the best and purest of all women!"

There are moments when it seems as though her heart would burst with anxiety, moments when she would fain sink down at his feet and cry:

"But do you not know? Has not uncle told you that I have already kissed another?" But she always remains silent. Ah, and that other beside him! How could she—what was she thinking of at that time? Only gradually does she become calm and happy after such scenes.

And the days pass full of work and expectation.

Greta Busch sews diligently at home, and walks the long distance to Beetzen with the completed work, and Ditscha pays her richly, out of pity, for Greta always looks anxious,—pays her twice as much as any other sewing-woman, and Greta really sews well. Even Hannah becomes reconciled to the "airy piece," as she used to call the former gardener's frivolous daughter. And one fine day—it is November now—the old woman comes into the sitting-room where Uncle Jo, Ditscha, and Rothe sit in the twilight, and says:

"Miss Ditscha, it really would not be a bad idea to keep Greta here. She wastes much time going and coming, and she can hardly do the large pieces in old mother Busch's little room. She has the table-cloths and napkins to do. If the baron has no objection to her staying here with the little girl, she could have the room with one window where I used to sleep, near the bedrooms."

"I have no objections, Hannah," says the baron, looking up from his paper. "You know what you need best."

"Then she can come to-morrow morning with the milk-wagon," says Hannah. "I will tell the bailiff," and with that she goes.

A strange feeling overcomes Ditscha, but what can she do? If this time were only over, if she need no longer see this person, the mere sight of whom degrades her! Good heavens, what demon had power over her at that time? Could she but blot out the recollections connected with Greta Busch, could she undo this hateful episode, she would give years of her life.

Now she hears Uncle Joachim say something softly to Rothe, and the latter replies: "I do not quite understand your tolerance, Baron." It sounds very cold, almost offensive; then he rises, joins Ditscha at the window, and draws her to him. It is almost dark, the first light, silvery, shining snow gleams on park and lawn.

"Perhaps we will have sleighing," says he. "Then we will drive with Achim over to see Santa Claus at Dombock. Sophie, I have promised the little fellow for a long time."

"Curt," comes instead of answer from her lips, "do you love me very dearly?"

"Yes, my heart!"

"With all my faults?"

"With all! Only as yet I have been able to discover none in you."

"But when you do find them?"

"I will forgive them all, all, for you could have none that were not lovable," is his happy answer.

She takes his hand quickly, and presses it to her cheek.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE TOILS.

GRETA has been in the house a week, and has brought her child with her, a little girl, beautiful as one of Murillo's cherubs. The mother modestly deprecates all praise, sits quietly in the sewing-room, and sews all day long, but the child trips about everywhere. Cilly is fascinated with her, and Achim plays with her on the large rug in the nursery. Cilly amuses herself, these quiet November days, with little Ella as she might with a doll. She even makes clothes for her, and one day the child appears in her mother's room in a pale blue silk Kate Greenaway costume, which Cilly has basted together from an old ball-gown.

"Oh, my sweet little pet," cries Greta rapturously, "you are dressed like a princess. Only wait, your mamma will buy you much prettier clothes yet, just wait a little." But an hour later she says to Hannah reproachfully: "They spoil the child here, such a poor little mite, who has never had anything but calico on her body before."

One day, it is four o'clock in the afternoon,

Greta receives a letter. She is just embroidering a monogram on a handsome tablecloth, but stops when she has read the letter, and begins to rub her eyes and sob. Half an hour later, she knocks at Ditscha's door, her eyelids red and swollen. The young girl is working on a table-cover for her *fiancé*, for a Christmas present, for this Christmas is to be her first really happy one.

"O God! Miss von Kronen, such misfortune, such ill luck!" sobs Greta.

"What has happened?" asks Ditscha, alarmed.

"Oh, my poor husband! Now they are going to drive him away from his new situation if he does not pay, and they have kept back his little bit of salary, and now I do not know what will happen if I do not get the money. O God, O God! Miss Sophie, have pity and lend me the few hundred dollars. I will thank you on my knees——"

Ditscha stares at her in surprise.

"But—I really cannot——"

"O Miss, as true as I stand here—in half a year you will have the money back." And the woman sobs and whines pitifully.

Ditscha still has the money her uncle had given her, for as no one could be found to accompany her to Berlin, to do her shopping—Mrs. Rothe had left quite suddenly, a grandchild having been taken ill, and Aunt Anna was residing in the convent of her order—the young couple had re-

solved to purchase the furniture on their wedding journey.

"He will kill himself—he will kill himself," sobs Greta—she does it excellently.

"How much do you need?"

"O heavens, it is too dreadful! and I only tell you because we will honestly pay it back, Miss von Kronen—eight hundred dollars——"

Ditscha starts. Ought she to give this without asking uncle?

"I will speak to the baron," says she.

Then Greta falls at her feet. "Oh, not that, only not that, Miss Sophie, I would rather jump into the river with Ella—oh, not that!"

Ditscha loosens her gown from Greta's hand, goes into her bedroom, and returns a few minutes later with a handful of bank-notes.

Greta cries out for happiness, tries to kiss Ditscha's hands, and thanks her effusively with streaming eyes, sobbing: She had always known Miss Sophie was good, and that she had not forgotten her, and Miss knew very well that Greta Busch is silent as the grave, and that she had never, never told a living soul one word about that time——

Ditscha suddenly leans against the edge of the table, and grows deathly pale. The cat has begun to play with the mouse.

"And people are so evil-minded," continues

Greta, "and if any one heard that you had had hour-long *rendezvous* in our good room, not a dog would take a piece of bread from you, Miss. And just now, when you are engaged to such a nice gentleman—but the gentlemen, Miss Ditscha, are so fussy about such things—O dear Miss Sophie! I thank you a thousand times, and I am like a grave—as silent as the grave——"

Ditscha stares after her as though she had seen a terrible spectre, as though a flash of lightning had disclosed to her the precipice along whose brink she was wandering. Suddenly she buries her face in her hands, and a sob shakes her frame. "My God," she says aloud, "how fearfully you are punishing me!" Then she sits and stares before her until it becomes dusk, finally dark, and she only starts up when there is a knock at her door, and the maid announces that Mr. Rothe has just come.

"Dora—I—cannot go down—I have such a terrible headache," she says; "ask them to excuse me."

She sinks back in her chair again. Only to be spared from seeing any one now, *him* least of all.

Then she hears a somewhat shuffling tread in the corridor and on the stairs, then a knock on her door, and in comes her uncle. Ditscha cannot see his features, but she knows that it is he.

"Well now, confound it, why are you sitting in the dark, child? Where are you? For pity's

sake make a light—are you then so ill? And where are you hiding? If I pull your tablecloth and ink on the floor I cannot help it,” says he, in the darkness.

Ditscha lights a lamp, and turns to the old man.

“You look really ill! Good heavens, Ditscha, what is the matter?” he asks. “You are sewing too much. Why do you women always make yourselves sick over your linen and flummery before your wedding day? Can you not come downstairs even for a minute, so that Curt may see that you are still alive? He is quite desperate. Well, can you not? Oh, come now.”

“Uncle,” says she, with sudden resolution, and comes up to the old man, her face pale and twitching, “Uncle, I have always wished to ask you——”

“You are quite hoarse, child; let Hannah look down your throat—have you fever?”

She pushes away his hands as he tries to feel her pulse.

“I have already often wished to ask you, Uncle,” she repeats, “did you really tell Curt on our engagement day the story about Hans Perthien and me, as you promised?”

He becomes greatly embarrassed.

“Don’t keep going back to that old story,” he growls angrily.

“So you did *not* tell him?” she asked.

“The devil—no!” he cries angrily. “Why

should I? You can tell him when you celebrate your silver wedding."

She makes no answer. He paces up and down the room violently, so that the light flickers, coughs, clears his throat, tries to speak, gives it up, and finally asks:

"Well, will you come downstairs or not, Ditscha?"

"Yes, I will be down in fifteen minutes."

"Very good, and do stop thinking of that damned business. When one tells such a thing so seriously it sounds like a drama, and it was only a trifle, a laughable nothing. Come soon, or he will think you are dying." And he goes.

"Fifteen minutes," she had said. She will think of these fifteen minutes as long as she lives. She will see him to-day once more, have him once more, before she confesses to him, places a decision in his hands. It shall be quite as usual, for to-morrow she will write him all, even about Greta Busch, unreservedly sparing nothing; will beg him to decide—life or death, for it can go on so no longer. She goes downstairs with a feeling in her heart such as Jephtha's daughter may have had when they granted her three more days of her young life before she must die.

He comes to meet her at the threshold of the room, gazing at her anxiously.

"Oh, Ditscha, do not become ill," he pleads,

"not now when I have not yet the right to nurse you."

She stares at him. Will he even desire that right to-morrow?

Achim is there, he is playing dominoes with Uncle Jo. The little fellow, who does not yet understand the game, makes the drollest plays, and Uncle's laugh rings through the room every moment. Ditscha and her lover sit in the bow-window, on the old window-seat, hand in hand, as they have done every day since they became engaged. He talks, asks questions about her headache, and regrets it. She must not talk at all, and he will not stay to supper, but come an hour earlier to-morrow instead.

"Please stay," she asks pleadingly, "it is really better now."

He does it only too gladly.

"I dreamed," she goes on, "that you loved me no longer."

"O you foolish Ditscha!"

"I did—I dreamed that I did something once, before I knew you—I think it was something terrible—I told you of it, and you dropped my hand and turned away——"

"What was it then, Ditscherle?" he says good-naturedly, relapsing into his Silesian dialect.

"Guess!"

"Stolen?"

"No, Curt."

"Been inquisitive?"

She shakes her head.

"Offended Uncle Jo or Hannah?"

"No!"

"Or in your heart bemoaned: 'Ah, heaven, now my lovely free maidenhood will soon be over, and I already hear the chains rattle, the indissoluble chains which will bind me to that dreadful old philister, Curt?'"

"No."

"Then I do not know, darling," says he.

"But there is something else. I dreamed that I told you I once fancied I loved another man."

He actually does drop her hand, hastily, so that it almost looks as though he repulsed her.

"Ah, you see!" says she softly.

For quite a while neither says a word: finally, he clasps her hand and draws it to his lips.

"Forgive me," says he, "how can you help it if you have such foolish dreams, for you mean nothing else by this, do you?"

"I do not know—of course not," she stammers, and feels a tremor shake her from head to foot, and she breathes more freely when Cilly dances in—Cilly, who for some time has been remarkably domestic, and has taken to writing quantities of letters.

She announces that she will go to Berlin in a

few days to attend to her Christmas shopping, at which big Jo mutters something unintelligible, and little Jo begins to beg: "Can I go with mamma? May I go too?"

"Oh, Heaven forbid; where could I leave you? Besides, I have calls to make."

"Leave me with Uncle Reeden," he proposes.

Cilly becomes very red, and energetically commands him to spare her such foolishness, but promises to bring him back something very pretty.

Then Frederick announces supper, and they go to the table. Cilly is merry, and Uncle Jo lets her enliven his mood. Rothe is out of sorts, and Ditscha sits there like an automaton. They speak of Christmas; the child leaves them no peace since he hears that mamma will see Santa Claus in Berlin. Uncle promises to ask for a sled for him.

"Don't forget, Uncle Curt."

"No, my boy."

"Uncle, what are you going to give Ditscha? Whisper to me," he says, and the little fellow stands up and leans his face close to the man's ear as Rothe whispers something to him.

"Oh!" he says wonderingly, "but how glad Ditscha will be—the whole castle?"

"But now you have told, naughty boy," says Rothe with apparent seriousness, and in an undertone he adds: "Yes, just think! the whole castle, everything in it, and myself as well."

Ditscha can scarcely restrain her tears, "And himself as well!"

"Let me accompany you to the park gate," she begs, as he prepares to leave after supper.

"But—Ditscha!"

"Ah, please, please! The air will do my head good."

In the hall he wraps her in her fur cloak, sends the carriage ahead, and both wander slowly down the road. It is a clear, windless, frosty evening, the stars shine in the dark blue sky. Past the gardener's lodge to the entrance she goes with him, and there she gives him both hands, and says: "Forgive me if I pained you; I did not wish to, for I love you very dearly."

Then she turns quickly, without giving him a chance to kiss her, and leaves him standing there bewildered, shaking his head. Upstairs in her room she sits down to write. Twenty or more sheets of paper she destroys, and it is long past midnight before she succeeds in composing the terrible letter:

"DEAR CURT:—

"Before we became engaged, I begged uncle to tell you something in my life that you must know before you unite your destiny with mine. But uncle told you nothing, as I have just now learned, though almost always suspected. Let me then do it now, before it is too late.

"I have already been engaged to a man whom neither my father nor my uncle thought the right one for me. They refused their consent, and we therefore resolved—to elope. A few hours after I left uncle caught me, and brought me back to Beetzen. He saved me from unhappiness—only perhaps that I might become even more unhappy.

"I do not know whether you can love me now. In any case I owe you the truth. But if you can no longer love and respect the girl who was ready to do something unworthy of her for a man whom she did not even love, at least do not refuse her your pity.

"There are two people who know of this affair, and whose discretion is not to be expected, for they are uncultivated and avaricious—Greta Busch and her husband, a certain Brose. This too, which even uncle does not know, I tell you. I dare not hope that you will forgive me, for I know what you think, and you are right to think as you do. I would give years of my life to undo this step, and if tears could wash it away, it would all have been obliterated.

SOPHIE VON KRONEN."

She puts the letter in an envelope; the next morning Franz shall take it over to Domböck. Completely exhausted, she throws herself upon her bed, and wishes to-morrow might never come.

Downstairs, Cilly too has been writing, on pink paper, twelve pages long, and one part runs as follows:

"Thank God, the comedy and so-called period of mourning will soon be over now. I think to be a widow for three years is really all that the strictest etiquette can require of me, especially when one considers the circumstances, which, I am happy to say, are known to no one but you and me.

"We both have loved each other since the time when I was a school-girl and you a lieutenant, and neither had a penny to marry on. And then, almost before I knew it, I became the wife of your commander.

"To think that the good Klaus should select just you as adjutant!

"To see you every day, to love you ever more and more, and yet to be bound—really, you do not suspect how my heart beat each time that I heard your ring. Ah, my heart's treasure! it was enough to drive one mad. If heaven had not been kind and excited the French to war, how would it have been? I do not like to think of it.

"Do you remember how you said good-by to me in the little blue room? I could not control my tears, and you were so pale; then suddenly we were clasped in each other's arms, and I was still in the midst of my sobs and trembling when Klaus came in, and in his good-naturedness fancied I was weeping for him. The poor man! Ah, heavens! and when you came back again, and I a widow—and all the time that followed—one-tenth part sad, and nine-tenths so sweet!

"I will say nothing against Klaus; he was a

good, noble man, and really, I did not deceive him, did I? No?

"And now soon yours! What will Jo say? Poor man! To be left alone with the vinegar-faced Anna, and old Hannah! Ditscha will probably stretch out protecting arms to the poor old fellow from Dombock.

"But darling, what shall we do with Achim while we roam about for a year? Ah, how I look forward to that with delight! Yes, but what is to be done with Achim? I have not even thought of it.

"So be punctual at Leontine's in Berlin. We can trust the good soul. I will be at the Berlin station about twelve o'clock.

"YOUR HAPPY CILLY."

Cilly seals the long envelope with her dainty seal-ring, kisses the letter a couple of times; then she stands in front of the glass, nods to her pretty reflection, and humming a song, goes to bed,—her conscience not troubling her in the least, although she had broken her plighted faith, while upstairs Ditscha grieves and torments herself about something for which others were more to blame than she, and yet has no reproaches for any one but herself.

Quite early the next morning she sends Franz with the letter; he rides over to Dombock. And Greta Busch takes Cilly's letter, she drives over to

Büchow in the milk-wagon; she must see her old mother.

Before the mounted messenger returns, Ditscha has a note from Curt Rothe:

“My sister’s little one is dead, dear Ditscha. I go to X. to-night by the midnight train. How are you? Send me news soon. I leave in great anxiety about you, my heart. Do not become ill.

“CURT.”

About ten o’clock Franz returns and says he gave Miss von Kronen’s letter to one of the servants to lay on Mr. Rothe’s desk; the gentleman had left home suddenly.

Ditscha is undecided what to do. Shall she send Franz over to bring back the letter? She does not know that she will find courage to send it a second time. Shall she send another letter with the same contents to X.? And add this blow to his grief at the child’s coffin? Oh no! She determines to leave the letter there; he may find it when he returns.

And now come his letters,—his letters, overflowing with love and tenderness. He writes beside the child’s coffin, where he is watching to calm the mother because she thinks her darling only seems to be dead; and in the evening in his room, after he has sat with the mourning parents until far into the night, near the arm-chair of his mother, who

sends Ditscha a thousand greetings, each word is full of longing.

And Ditscha cannot, dare not write as she would. She endures what can only be compared to the agony of death. Finally, her strange, brief little notes alarm him; if he could only leave he would return at once. Is she not well? She must tell him, for then he will come in spite of everything.

She writes him she is well, he must not worry. But nevertheless a letter comes, announcing his return for such and such a time—the day after tomorrow. Hannah brings the letter to Ditscha in the sitting-room, where she sits as usual with Uncle and Achim.

Hannah cannot go without expressing her indignation with this good-for-nothing Greta. To stop all of a sudden, in the midst of the work. Wrote ten days ago as excuse that she must go to her husband, who had become ill. He would not die at once. If it were only not the beautiful damask table-cover that she had so suddenly stopped working on!

Ditschâ suspects why she has gone. She is taking the money to a safe place.

"Some one else can finish it," says she absently; "there is no hurry."

"No hurry? Good gracious, Miss Ditscha, the wedding is in two weeks, and—no hurry? That is fine indeed!"

Ditscha makes no answer; she stares at the floor, then springs up and runs out of the room. Voices ring in her ears, such sweet, coaxing voices: "Go, Ditscha, recall the letter, do not make the good man wretched. You have done nothing dishonorable; your uncle says so too. You have no right to make yourself and him unhappy. Her heart beats wildly at the thought of seeing him again; a longing so ardent, so intense, overcomes her, that she rushes to her writing-desk to send word to the servant at Dombock that she wishes back the letter she sent some time ago to Mr. Rothe; its contents are now worthless, something has happened to change them.

But why give an excuse? She simply asks for the letter, that is enough. She will send for it early to-morrow.

Somewhat more composed, she goes down to supper. Cilly teases her about her pallor and red eyelids. The young woman has returned from Berlin in a highly satisfied frame of mind. It was charming there; she has brought back new gowns with her, and an enormous trunk full of Christmas presents: a wedding present for Ditscha is also in it, very handsome and expensive. And when Cilly is alone in her room, she dreams of many kisses, charming bouquets, and foolish, rapturous plans for the future. She and he—
/ Monte Carlo, Nice, Florence, Venice, Rome, Na-

ples! One word, conscience, does not exist for the charming woman. *C'est la vie!* How can a man fall in love with that tiresome ghost, Ditscha? To be sure, she must admit that the ghost has wonderful eyes, eyes shaded by long lashes and in which lies a depth of love, of sorrow, such as she has never before seen in any one; but she is a little afraid of them, she does not understand them.

"Well, Ditscherle, and day after to-morrow comes Curterle with Mutterle, as they say in Silesia?" she asks the pale girl gayly. And as Ditscha nods assent, Uncle adds:

"It is high time, the child looks really ill. Yes, yes, my dear, now the time when you are to leave us draws nearer and nearer."

"Ditscha, please stay here," says Achim tearfully. Cilly laughs.

"Uncle Rothe can come here," he declares.

"Or you can go to Dombock," proposes Cilly eagerly; "would you like that?"

"No, I will stay with Uncle Jo," says the child.

The old man blows his nose loudly; the little fellow's love always affects him deeply.

"You say nothing about me," remarks Cilly. "Oh, you naughty boy!"

"What should I say, mamma?" he declares. "I can sit in your room ever so long and you do not even notice it, for you are always writing. And yesterday when I asked you to put a new

lash on my whip you said: 'For heaven's sake, let me alone!' . And Mademoiselle, too, is so disobliging, I cannot bear her. Ditscha always does what I ask her to, and Ditscha must stay here."

"There you have it," says Cilly to Ditscha. "Write that to Rothe."

Ditscha does not answer. During the night she lies sleepless. Suppose he has returned unexpectedly this evening, found the letter, and broken the seal in joyful haste to find this—this! Almighty God! She cannot bear to lose him, she would rather die. And even if he forgives her, will he forget? Will not distrust remain to torment him always—always? Is it not a thousand times worse than to leave him in ignorance?

Yes, yes, she must have the letter back.

Then her heart speaks again, her great noble, honest heart: "Frankness, Ditscha, the truth! Bear the consequences!"

She is really ill when she rises and drags herself to the window, is neither capable of sending for the letter, nor finding consolation in the thought that she is doing right. When she appears at breakfast even Uncle Jo is startled by her wretched look.

"Franz must go for the doctor," he says. But Ditscha declares she is not ill.

After breakfast Hannah has all kinds of questions concerning Christmas and the wedding prep-

arations. Each question causes Ditscha actual physical pain. Then she stands in her room, where all the linen of her outfit is piled up, and sees Hannah bending over a large flat box. The wedding gown has arrived.

"The dressmaker is somewhat ahead of time," says Hannah, "but better that than too late, miss. And when one works only from a sample waist to fit by, it is always a question whether it will be all right, even if she were ten times a court dressmaker. Will the old box never open?"

"Leave it in the box," says Ditscha wearily.

"What!" cries Hannah. "Where? So that it may all lie in creases, and in the church you look as though you had just been unpacked?" And with a fearful crack the cover flies up; there is a rustle of white tissue-paper, and then Hannah lifts out the gown of snowy, silvery, gleaming satin, with a very long train, and delicate lace ruching at the hem, with orange-blossoms scattered here and there.

"Beautiful!" says Hannah with satisfaction, "really beautiful!"

But Ditscha has vanished, and runs upstairs to her own room as though pursued. It seems to her that she is suffocating.

A few hours later Cilly comes. She has seen the wedding gown, and wishes to give Ditscha her opinion of it; she finds the girl at her writing-

desk, staring at an envelope not yet either sealed or addressed, her face fairly distorted with pain.

"But my dear child, what is the matter?" asks Cilly. "Have you had any quarrel with Rothe? Pray calm yourself. They all act that way; your papa could look as though he would eat one up, and yet, *au fond*, it was only anxiety about me. He seems a little fond of moralizing, your future husband; well then, always act as though you were quite of his opinion; then you can do as you like, he will not even notice it if you say how right he is. He seems also jealous, but that will vanish of itself, it is only the idealism of an engaged man." And she laughs, runs to the stove, and looks forward to Christmas eve, for this day will belong to her.

No presents will be given out, as it is the anniversary of the death of Joachim's only son. The day is still consecrated to mourning, although much more sensibly, thanks to the presence of the little one, and Aunt Bertha's death. On this day not even Rothe may come, Ditscha will stay alone with Uncle, and little Achim must pass his time with Mademoiselle. But Cilly will have a guest, quite secretly, a dear guest. He is coming to the Schlüchterns for the holidays. Cilly thinks only of this now, and for this reason she dances hither and thither on her little feet.

Ditscha suffers terribly from the young widow's

presence, finally she scarcely hears what she chatters. "Ah! Cilly," she says at length. "I have such a bad headache, excuse me to Uncle. I cannot possibly come to dinner."

Cilly finally understands and goes. At the door she turns:

"In your place," she remarks, her thoughts returning to the wedding gown, "I should have preferred brocade. At twenty-four, one can wear brocade. I shall—would certainly have chosen brocade."

Ditscha locks the door behind her. The same agony, the same doubts torment her far into the night. But she still has time, to-morrow she can still send for the letter. She counts every hour that the clock strikes in the long night that follows this day, hours in which she suffers all that it is possible to suffer. Toward morning she has made up her mind, she will have the letter back. She does not feel unworthy, she is not lying when she says: "I have loved but thee"—certainly not. Ah, she cannot give him up!

She sends the maid to Franz: he must ride over to Dombock and bring back a letter, but at once!

Franz is in bed with a sore throat. Cilly's groom has ridden over to Büchow with a long list of commissions at an ungodly hour; the under-coachman cannot leave the stables.

Perhaps the bailiff has a messenger.

"Is there such great haste?" asks Hannah.

"Yes!" gasps Ditscha.

"Will not noon be time enough? Then Minna can go over there. She can walk there and back in an hour and a quarter if she goes across the fields by the short cut. Now she is attending to the poultry."

"If nothing else can be done," says Ditscha. She knows that he will not arrive in Dombock before nine o'clock that evening.

Toward noon her little brother comes into the room, in one hand a letter for Ditscha, in the other an apple, as fresh and rosy-cheeked as the boy himself.

"Ditscha," says he, climbing upon her lap, "it is so stupid with Mademoiselle; write for little Ella to come back, please."

Ditscha nods, pets him, and gazes at the letter. From Hamburg? A dreadful, unpractised handwriting, poor paper——

She opens it with the certainty that it contains something unpleasant, but she had not expected *this*. The letter is from Greta Busch:

"Miss von Kronen.

"DEAR LADY:—With a heavy heart and trembling hand I take my pen to tell you of my fresh misfortune, for I know how good dear Miss always is.

"We are here in Hamburg now, because we meant to go to America on the sly, with the money you gave me, and now such bad luck. O Miss Ditscha, heaven keep you from such a fate! My husband is a bad fellow; he gambled away all the eight hundred dollars yesterday in a gambling house here, and when I reproached him he struck me; I looked like a sick cat. And he could do what he liked to me, but now he is so wild, and says you could give us something again—that he drove us both to the station that time—and that he and I have never spoken to a soul about it.

"O dear Miss Sophie! I do not want to write it, but he makes me, for he says if you don't give him something he will go to Mr. Rothe, who would see then that we went to America, and in the first cabin, too, not a word about steerage. Miss, I beg you to give me some money again, and in three days we will be on the ship. I have no power over the man, and only think, it would not be good for such a thing to come between lovers. I am most humbly your servant,

"GRETA BROSE, born BUSCH."

Ditscha has read the letter: now she says gently to her little brother, who is still sitting on her lap, eating the apple: "Get down, dear, and ring the bell for me, please."

Hannah, who happens to be in the corridor, comes in.

"Hannah," says Ditscha calmly, "it is not

necessary for Minna to go to Dombock; it is all right as it is."

"So much the better," says the busy woman, "work is pressing now, and I think too Mr. Rothe will come to Beetzen on his way to Dombock, and then you can tell him what you wish, Miss. Child, do you want to come to the apple-cellar with me?"

Does child Achim not? The next moment Ditscha sits alone.

After reading this letter, she has become calm. She dares not leave him in ignorance, she must tell him all, must wait to learn whether he will pardon or reject her; she has no right to expose the honor of his future wife to the will of scoundrels.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS EVE.

CURT ROTHE arrived at Dombock at the appointed time. He would have preferred to make a slight detour and stop at Beetzen on his way, but he feared to startle Ditscha; she must be decidedly ill or very nervous. He will go over there early to-morrow morning. In any case, there must be a letter here from her, since no more had arrived in X. for him.

His overseer meets him at the door; he sees by the former's face that all is well, and dismisses him pleasantly until the next morning. The dachshunds almost dislocate their bones in their delight, and the mastiff slowly rises and pushes his cold nose into his hand, as though to say: "Yes, it is you, welcome, master!" With this four-footed retinue he goes upstairs, not without the thought: "The next time I return home it will be with her."

His study is comfortably warm, and the lamp is burning. A simple supper awaits him in the adjoining dining-room. He rubs his hands with

satisfaction, speaks to his man, pets the dogs, then wishes to go to his bedroom to change his clothes. But first he goes to his writing-desk, where lie a quantity of letters, newspapers, pamphlets. He seeks first of all some love-token, a few flowers, a bit of Christmas green, a book, or a plate of his favorite cake, as he has so often found. In vain, he finds nothing. In his haste he looks through the pile of letters; is there none from her?

A shadow lies on his face when he comes back a few minutes later, after changing his clothes. He seats himself at his writing-desk, turns up the lamp, and begins to search again, and more calmly.

"Ah," says he finally, satisfied, "here it is!"

Frederick appears in the doorway, and announces that supper is served. He is just breaking open the envelope, and cries: "I will come at once!"

Frederick goes. His master does not like to have the servants stand by and watch him eat. He has said once for all: "I will ring when I want you."

So Frederick goes. He waits a quarter, half-an-hour, no ring. He waits three-quarters of an hour, then he thinks his master must have forgotten dessert, and carries in the dish of fruit. He pauses in bewilderment, no one sits at the table, the dishes no longer steam, plates, glasses, viands are untouched. He sets down the dish of fruit, and runs into the next room.

“Lieutenant!”

No one there, even the dogs are gone, and the hunting-cap is missing from its hook.

“I really believe he has gone to the stable,” murmurs Frederick, “and in his thin house-shoes—or perhaps he has gone to Beetzen to see his sweetheart.” And shaking his head, he takes away the despised supper to rewarm it in the kitchen.

Through the park wanders a man; even there he feels as though suffocating. And his wild pain drives him out upon the highway; pain has come upon him and unmanned him as it had never done before in his life, not even at the time of his father’s death.

So that is Sophie von Kronen, the girl who had seemed to him a celestial being, purer than the snow as it falls from heaven! The girl before whom he had knelt to thank her for descending from her pedestal to belong to him! She who is so shy in her demonstrations of love, who blushing lowers her lashes at every word of affection—she had once been on the point of forgetting honor and propriety with a man——

God, have pity, it *can* not be true! She is ill, she wrote that letter in the delirium of fever! But no, no! An hour had come when she was overpowered with shame for her lies! For her whole engagement to him was a lie! She was afraid of

being found out! The old man was to have told him——

He laughs hoarsely. This, *this* was the reason for the proud baron's ready consent. He was good enough, good enough to rehabilitate the misguided, tolerated member of the highly esteemed family! He pauses in a lonely, gloomy path, in the snow of the wintry night, and shudders with disgust.

Ah! heaven, where was he going? To Beetzen? Perhaps to throw his ring at her feet? Folly! He will not disturb her slumber. Probably she is dreaming that he will come to-morrow to tell her: "I believe in you, what do I care about your past? I cannot give you up, cannot live without you!"

"Never! never! never!" He almost screams it. The little dachshund who has followed her master, shivering, her tail between her legs, rubs, whining, against him, as though saying: "What is the matter? You frighten me, master!"

He goes on, on until he comes to the closed gate of Beetzen park. There he stands, and leans against the wrought-iron gate, and stares at the house in which *she* lives. Suddenly, in mad frenzy, he shakes the massive iron-work with both hands, then he leans his forehead against the cold iron and begins to weep bitterly.

He sees not a soul; only the little animal whines

in the snow beside him, and the stars shine clear and cold above him. He weeps for his shattered ideal.

The next day, Ditscha waits and waits—no letter, no answer!

Joachim von Kronen notices that Rothe does not come. "Ditscha, surely the boy is not ill?"

She says she does not know.

The day passes, and the following one begins; then Joachim receives a letter. In a firm, clear handwriting it states that the writer is obliged to leave home again quite suddenly, but cannot state how long he shall be absent. Not a word to Ditscha.

She knows enough. Nor has she ventured to hope that he will forgive her. But nevertheless, such a hopeless misery now overcomes her that she scarcely has strength enough to drag herself to her room, and there she sinks upon the bed.

Hannah, who finds her after hours, is sent to tell her uncle that she is ill. She refuses to answer any questions. "Do not trouble yourself about me, Hannah; let no one come in, take the key away," she begs, "I cannot speak."

Ditscha's world lies in ruins for the second time, more utterly, hopelessly in ruins even than six years ago.

Poor Ditscha!

For days she lies in her room, utterly apathetic. Hannah takes care of her, if it can be called care, for she needs almost nothing.

No one in the house suspects what has happened. The baron has written to Rothe, asking an explanation. The letter comes back unopened. The old man is on the verge of despair: the sad anniversary, Rothe's unexplained departure, his niece's illness,—he knows no other refuge than his old comforter, grog.

Hannah goes about with tearful eyes. She has locked the door of the room where the trousseau was kept, after throwing a cloth over the white bridal gown, which looked, on its form, like a ghost of dead happiness in the faint light, and puts the key in her pocket.

"Oh! Beetzen Manor is a nest of unhappiness. Has there even once been any real happiness here since one can remember? Scarcely does one fancy a bit of sunshine has come when the storm drives the blackest clouds across it again."

She goes on tiptoes into Ditscha's room, bends over the sick girl, and, in spite of the faint light, can perceive the features, stony with grief, of the dear face. The faithful old soul suddenly buries her face in her apron, and bursts into sobs.

Ditscha does not even notice her,—she, who usually can see no one, least of all a child or inferior, weep.

Toward evening Hannah comes again; she has thought of something to rouse Ditscha.

"Ah, Miss Ditscha, I shall never get through; there is too much on my shoulders, with the Christmas gifts for the people, and cake-baking——"

Ditscha does not turn her head. What concern is this of hers?

"The boy is pining for you, too, Miss Ditscha."

The girl holds her hand over her eyes with a faint groan, as though she would say: "Leave me, what can I be to any one else now?"

"And the baron—O God in heaven, Miss Ditscha! Frederick had to put him to bed again yesterday evening—you know—grog—and now he has no one to keep him from it."

"Leave me alone!" cries Ditscha, "leave me alone!" And she clutches her hair with both hands like a desperate person. "Do not torture me! I can do no more, go!"

Hannah goes, and tells the old baron something, and Franz goes to Büchow for the doctor. Of course Ditscha has fever, but there is no physical cause, the whole trouble is mental. Can she not be taken away from Beetzen? Or at least can they not induce her to tell what torments her? To unburden one's mind sometimes works wonders.

The old man comes up to her room himself, seats himself at her bedside, his face troubled, and

in his awkward, well-meaning way asks her to confide in him.

She makes no answer.

"But you must be sensible, child; if you keep everything to yourself so we cannot help you. Tell me, Ditscha dear, what has happened?"

"Do not torture me," she screams, "do not torture me!" And she becomes so excited that it is with difficulty that Hannah can hold her in bed, and the doctor leads the amazed old man from the room, forbidding him to return. Then when she is alone with Hannah she relapses into her apathy, and thus she lies this day before Christmas, utterly without energy or strength.

Ah, it is a sad Christmas eve, this one to which she had looked forward with such inexpressible joy!

About four o'clock she asks Hannah for a cup of very strong coffee. She drinks it, and then asks, sitting up: "How is Uncle?"

"How should he be? You know, Miss, this is Christmas eve, and he is quite alone downstairs. He sits in his room and mourns for his dead wife, the poor old master!"

"Are you going to church, Hannah?"

"I should like to, that God might look with kindness upon this house, but can I go away? Oh, such a Christmas, such a Christmas! And I am fairly worn out, and no one to take anything

off my shoulders—and I cannot even go to church and strengthen myself with God's Word, for what would happen while I was gone?"

"Nothing will happen, Hannah. You can go, I will get up."

"God be praised!" says the old woman. "How gladly I will help you, Miss Ditscha. Put on a warm wrapper."

"No, a gown, my newest gown." The idea has come to poor hopeless Ditscha: If he returns it will be to-day or—never! And she will at least be ready.

When she takes the first steps in her room she staggers as though she had been seriously ill. Hannah pours her out a glass of wine, and forces her to eat something: all these days she has scarcely taken anything.

She tries to braid her beautiful hair, but trembles so that she is unable to do it. Hannah brushes and combs it as though she were a little girl.

"Now I will sit by the window, Hannah," says she, "and you go to church and—pray for me, Hannah, pray for me."

"Yes, that I will," says the old woman. "I have already, Miss Ditscha." And after she has glanced anxiously at her idolized young mistress, she goes to get ready for church.

Ditscha sits by the window, her head leaning

against the back of the chair, her gaze fixed upon the snowy landscape from which day is slowly vanishing, and she waits, waits as probably few have waited for another, in such consuming, trembling anxiety, such ardent longing. He must come, he must come once again, and she will ask nothing more. Only one thing will she tell him, that he is the only one she loves and has ever loved, and she will ask but one thing, that he will forgive her—nothing more—nothing more.

What will become of her ruined, wrecked life she does not think of now; all her feelings are wrapped up in the thought: he will come!

Meanwhile, Achim is quite alone in the nursery. He has played with his blocks and his soldiers, he has sat on his rocking-horse, and Mademoiselle, in a highly absent-minded manner, has told him a fairy story, which he has interrupted again and again with the reproachful cry: "But you just said the king was named Grimbart, and now you call him Brighteyes."

Or: "But you just said the sister had seven brothers, and now she has only five!"

Finally the story came to an end, and Mademoiselle said he must be very good and quiet: she would be back in a few minutes, and would bring him something from Santa Claus, whom she would probably meet; then she disappeared, after glancing in the mirror.

The brave little fellow tries very hard to be good, and has been standing now for some time at the window, staring out into the park, amusing himself watching the fine clouds of snow which the wind drives across the lawn. But, finally, he tires of this. Mademoiselle is gone so long, and Hannah has told him that he cannot go to Uncle Jo to-day. The peculiar old man has indeed refused to see his little darling, for this day is sacred to the memory of his wife and son. No, Bertha would surely not forgive him if he forgot *to-day* even for a moment; it would be faithless to the dead. Achim can be consoled to-morrow.

The child sighs, it is so uncannily quiet in the large room, where gray twilight already fills all the corners. Suddenly he begins to be frightened. Do angels really come unheard into all the houses to-day, to see if the children are good? Slowly he turns around and glances timidly at the dark corner on the other side of the stove. What is that white thing back there? He starts, swallows several times, and clutches at his throat, the little mite.

But no; that is Mademoiselle's combing sacque. Mademoiselle has the bad habit of arranging her hair in Achim's room, because the mirror there "makes one so pretty."

Or yes—is it an angel? He would like to go and grasp the white thing, but he dares not.

Suddenly the utter silence and loneliness overpower the child with terrible force.

"Mamma!" he cries loudly; "Mamma!" But mamma does not hear. Mamma has also said he must not come to her room this afternoon, for she would be busy with Santa Claus.

"Hannah!" now he is crying; "Hannah!" But Hannah is clasping her hands over her hymn-book in the dimly lighted church, and praying for Miss Ditscha; the little boy's tearful cry: "Hannah, dear Hannah!" can not reach her. With tearful eyes she looks up at the empty Von Kronen pew. No one is there from Beetzen Manor, no one, and yet a happy young couple were to have attended service this evening. Ten days ago, Miss Ditscha had herself told her: "On Christmas eve I will meet my betrothed in our church, Hannah." Now she is ill and the betrothed absent. Yes, Hannah cannot hear the child call.

Suddenly the brave little fellow takes heart, and runs quickly from the room into the adjoining one, which is mamma's dressing-room, and from there to her bedroom, past the bed, with its pink silk and lace draperies, into which he has sometimes crept to kiss mamma or play with her soft hair. Then he looks into mamma's parlor; everything is bathed in the soft light of the rose-shaded lamp at the side of papa's picture, and in the next room, the writing-room, is mamma herself. She must

not send him away again, mamma whom his little tender heart loves so dearly, more than Hector and the beautiful rocking-horse, more even than Uncle Jo and Ditscha.

Achim is afraid, that is why he is going to mamma,—he has a right to go. He walks on tip-toes, and thrusts his little face with the pleading child-eyes between the velvet portières, but he draws it back deathly pale. He is a strange child; he does not utter a sound, only clenches his fists, the six-year old boy, and his chubby face wears a look of pained astonishment. He cannot cry, although his red lips quiver. He stands as though rooted to the ground, then turns and runs back to the still darker nursery, and from there out into the hall, and to the door of Uncle Joachim's room. But, reach up as he may to turn the knob, it does not open; Uncle Joachim has bolted it. Now he runs upstairs to Ditscha's room—here too the door is locked.

"Ditscha," he sobs, "Ditscha!" Then very tenderly, as he has heard Uncle Rothe: "Ditscherle! Sweet Ditscha!" But here, too, no one opens. Ditscha is dead to all that passes about her. She only glances absently at the door as Achim is already creeping downstairs again, an anxious, unhappy child, who can find no one to soothe him.

For a few moments the perplexed little fellow stands down in the hall, ready to burst into fearful

screams, then a thought comes to his mind: Uncle Rothe! Uncle Rothe must help to drive away the man who kissed mamma, he must remind her of Achim—Achim is still here. She must not drive Achim away and forget him, and Uncle Rothe must help him.

He trips to the house door, raises the latch, and behold, it is unlocked! With difficulty he opens the heavy door a crack, steps through, and runs out into the night.

He is in thin velvet blouse and knickerbockers, his blond head uncovered, his little feet in thin house-shoes. What does he care for the snow and wind? It is not at all far to Dombock; he has often gone there with Ditscha, and out here he is not at all afraid; he wants nothing, he will only bring Uncle Rothe to Beetzen.

The old clock in the Beetzen hall does not marvel; it knows well that something unusual always happens on Christmas eve, but it's "Where—to? Where—to?" sounds more emphatic, sadder, to-day, almost as though it called: "Help—help! Help—help!"

But there is no one there to hear it.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAREWELL.

FOR Curt Rothe it has been night since the moment when he read Ditscha's letter. More hopeless despair could not have overpowered him if he had received the news of her death, instead of this confession.

His servants shake their heads over him: he scarcely eats, at most he drinks; all day long, after he has attended to necessary business, he sits at his writing-desk upon which stands Ditscha's picture, and broods. As yet he has not even written to his mother. The only letter was the one to the old baron.

Each evening, at the time when he used to hasten to Ditscha, a fearful unrest seizes upon him: then he takes his cap from its hook, and leaves the house. Aimlessly he rushes hither and thither in the snow and cold, always thinking the same: Is it really true? Is it possible? With actual horror he calls to mind the beloved face, the beautiful, mournful eyes, the delicate, sorrowful mouth; and all this has already belonged to another. He

remembers Ditscha's anxious astonishment when he said that he could not bear to share even her heart's recollections with another; ah! and how she must have loved this other to be willing to sacrifice everything for him—home, honor, reputation, all!

When he had arrived at this point—and his thoughts take the same direction perhaps twenty times a day—he strikes his forehead with clenched fist, and would gladly throttle the man who has dared to love her.

He cannot see her again, he will not, only not that! After a while then each time he discovers himself on the road to Beetzen, and turns around with the thought: What now? She is still engaged to him, something must be done. He must inform the baron that he is unfortunately obliged to refuse the honor of becoming the husband of Sophie von Kronen. Then away from this neighborhood, Dombock shall be leased, then sold at the first favorable opportunity.

At least she has kept him from the worst, the stamp of ridicule, from the remarks in all *cafés* and saloons: "Mrs. Rothe! Ah! the famous Ditscha, who ran away once with so and so?" He knows that—good heavens!—it would be enough to make one send a ball through his head. Then a mad longing seizes him; he would like to see her once more, with his eyes so terribly disillusionized;

would like to say to her: "So this is you, whom I have revered as a saint? I forgive you, yes, I forgive you! Farewell, and if it is possible, do not often make an honorable fellow as miserable as you have made me; there are those who would not look upon it quite in the same light. You must seek out such, but not one like me, whom it will ruin that he has given all his heart to a girl for whom he is and was not the only man in the world."

He cannot, no, he cannot. He wishes no wife with a past, he does not wish one who can lie so—her whole engagement to him was a lie. Oh yes, he remembers so many circumstances, her opposition when he offered her his heart, her urgent entreaty: "Speak first to Uncle!" Ah yes, but what now? What is to be done?

To-day too, on Christmas eve he has rushed out of his room into which packages had been brought for him from the post—from home. What must they think, his family, because he still has not written? In this box are also presents for Ditscha, and from that large one yonder comes the fragrance of home-made Christmas cakes.

He could not bear it, he rushed out again into the snow, in the night and storm. He wanders along the road, always with the same confused thoughts; the icy wind feels good to him, the snow blows against him, and clings to hair and beard, he does not even notice it. The road is bare as

though swept, only at the right rise white banks; scarce half the height of the fruit trees is visible above them. Behind him, shivering, runs the little brown dachshund, as usual. Occasionally the little animal stands still and gazes back in amazement, as though asking: "Master, will you not soon return?" Then she runs on again to overtake him; she does not know what to think of her master now, yet feels that some one must stay with him. Her mate lies comfortably at home asleep in the sofa corner, but she cannot rest, she goes with her master. He is so peculiar now; sometimes she may lie in his lap for hours, and he will scratch her head, as though absorbed in thought, then suddenly he springs up, so violently that she is hurled abruptly to the floor, and rushes out. How can she remain at home?

Suddenly the intelligent little animal stands still and raises her fine head, then with two springs is over by the snowdrift and, giving a hoarse howl, begins to dig at it. The next moment her master is beside her. At the edge of the snowdrift lies something, a man, a child; the snow has already spread a light covering over it. Curt Rothe raises the being thus sunk down to death, and hears a faint whimper: "Uncle Rothe! Mamma—mamma!"

"Is it you, my boy?" asks the astonished man.

"Uncle Rothe," he whimpers, "tired!" and the poor little fellow totters on his little legs.

"How did you come here? Do not go to sleep, Achim!"

He shakes the half-frozen little wight, picks him up in his arms, unbuttons his overcoat, presses him to his breast, and draws the coat around him while he walks on. Only for a moment has he deliberated: To me, or—to Beetzen? But Beetzen is nearer, and the wind at his back.

"Achim," he pants, hurrying on with the burden that rests a dead weight in his arms, "Achim, why did you run away?"

"I was so lonesome! oh, so lonesome!" murmurs the child, overcome with sleep.

"All alone, Achim?"

"Yes, Uncle Jo is sad, Mademoiselle went away, and Ditscha is ill, and mamma—" suddenly the half-dead child remembers why he ran away: "Dear Uncle Rothe, mamma does not love me any more; please help me—she must not let Uncle Reeden kiss her any more."

"Are you very cold, Achim?"

"No, I am so tired."

Curt Rothe walks on hurriedly. Had he come fifteen minutes later! The thought makes him shudder.

Yonder is the church steeple of Beetzen; if he goes across the field he will cut off a good bit of

the distance, and arrive ten minutes sooner at the manor.

Meanwhile, Mademoiselle has come home and failed to find Achim in the nursery. At first she smiles carelessly, still revelling in the recollection of the handsome volunteer, in the room over at the bailiff's house, who for the moment is her friend, and she kisses the gold watch he has given her, and twirls on her heels madly, singing some French song. Then all at once she cries: "Achim, *arrivez tout de suite!*"

All is silence.

He must be with his mother. But his mother did not wish to have him.

Just then the maid brings up the supper for Mademoiselle and the boy

"Have you seen Achim?" asks Mademoiselle. "Is he with his mamma?"

"No, the baroness is all alone with her guest; they want no third party to-day," says the maid, with a significant smile.

"But—where can he be? I will ask myself." And Mademoiselle trips to the drawing-room door, and calls: "Achim! Achim!"

"He is not here," madame's silvery voice calls, "and he must not come, *comprenez?*—he must play by himself to-day."

Mademoiselle runs back to the nursery, from thence to the kitchen, then to the baron's room.

"What do you want?" asks Frederick, just then coming out.

"Is Achim with his uncle?"

"No, and he must not come to him to-day."

Mademoiselle goes upstairs to Ditscha. She knocks so energetically that the girl, absorbed though she is in her grief, starts up and totters across the room to open the door, "Who is there?" she stammers.

"Oh, Miss von Kronen! Achim! Achim must come to his supper, and is not to be found."

"Achim? Achim is not here?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" cries Mademoiselle, "*O quel malheur!* Achim is gone! I left him alone a few minutes."

"Gone?" repeats Ditscha mechanically, and mechanically she goes to the stairs, where she seats herself upon the top step, and gazes confusedly before her.

"He is not with madame, and not with the baron; not in the kitchen, and not in the nursery," moans Mademoiselle.

Ditscha has grown deathly pale. Ah, she knows the Christmas eves in this house, and how they oppress a childish heart! Suddenly she rushes downstairs and flings open the house-door! There are footprints, little footprints half-covered with snow, leading down the steps. In the next moment, she rushes out into the snowy night, after the footprints.

The child too! Oh, it is bad for young hearts, Beetzen Manor! They hunger and thirst for love, they long to be away, and wander astray.

"Achim! Achim!" she cries, half breathless from the wind as she rushes on. The park gate is still open, the people have not yet returned from church. Here too are little tracks, and now across the highroad. "Achim! Achim!" She no longer feels her weakness, only dreads one thing: the child has lost his way—is frozen—dead!

But she cannot search for him out here alone, lanterns must be brought; she turns and runs back a few steps. Then the thought occurs to her: "Hannah has taken the boy to church with her," and again she turns toward the entrance, she will go to the church. Suddenly she grows dizzy, sinks exhausted on one of the stone curbs, and rests her head in her hand, half unconscious. And then, all of a sudden, something rushes up to her, a little black dog, it leaps about in wild delight, and makes her heart beat furiously, for there comes—comes——

She is incapable of moving, her eyes stare at him. Slowly he nears the gate, he does not see her, his eyes are fixed upon something he carries in his arms. At this moment the coachman hurries past her; two steps in front of Ditscha they meet; she sees Rothe give him what he carries in his arms, hears the coachman cry: "Thank God!

thank God!" hears Rothe warn him to hurry to the house as quickly as possible, to rub the child's limbs with snow, not to take it into a warm room at once. Suddenly a crowd of people surround the coachman, the light of lanterns shines even on her, and in the next moment they all go away to the house, but she is not able to move. Her eyes are fixed upon the man she loves.

He still has not seen her. Now he takes off his hat, wipes his damp brow, draws a deep breath, gives one long look at the house, then slowly turns and goes.

He has not wished to come to her, he seeks no reconciliation, he goes.

"Curt!" she cries out.

He turns and comes nearer to her, as she stands there drawn up to her full height.

"You?" he asks.

"I was looking for Achim."

He stands before her, hat in hand, as though awaiting a command. The wind tugs at his coat and her gown, the snow falls between them, not a soul but these two in the solitude of the holy night, and no angel with a message of peace.

"Farewell!" says she finally, perceiving that he will remain silent. "Pardon me that as a young, lonely child, I once went astray. Had I always known you, it would not have happened. Give me your hand, Curt—so——"

With a firm pressure, she lays her engagement ring in his hand. "Be happy! I understand you, your doubts—all—I dare not blame you, but believe me, I would have given you nothing unworthy of you, Curt. Farewell!"

"Ditscha!" he cries, and grasping her hands draws her to him. "Ditscha, forgive me—let it be as it was. Have patience with me, I shall learn to overcome it."

She draws her hands from him.

"No," says she firmly, "that is nothing for you, and nothing for me. Your confidence has vanished, your love gone, and good will, consideration, and a sense of duty would not suffice for us both. Farewell, Curt!"

He can plainly distinguish her beautiful, proud face as she speaks thus. She nods to him once more with mournful gravity, then goes.

Suddenly he strides to her side.

"What do you wish, Curt?" she asks, pausing.

"You cannot go alone, so in the dark," he stammers; his doubts seem vanished before the charm which her pure, proud presence exercises over him.

"Oh!" says she, and her lips curve in a bitter smile, "let me go; I shall be forced to tread still darker paths alone. Farewell!"

"Ditscha!" he calls after her hoarsely, in a

broken voice. But she does not look around; with firm tread she goes her way, and enters the house.

In the house an indescribable state of excitement prevails. Mademoiselle has been ordered to leave to-morrow. Jo von Kronen, to whom Captain von Reeden had been presented perforce as Cilly's *fiancé*, for the furious old man had burst like a bomb upon their tender *tête-à-tête*, with the question, "Where is your child?" had only a very ironical bow for the stately officer, and screamed continually, "Where is Achim?" although the boy had already been brought home, and was under Hannah's care, until the arrival of the doctor.

When, half-an-hour later, Cilly enters the nursery, she has indeed become formally engaged to her long-beloved Arthur, but Joachim von Kronen has formally deposed her from her rights as a mother. She starts at sight of the figure sitting beside the bed as though she belonged there—Ditscha; Ditscha looking like a ghost, without a drop of blood in her cheeks, fairly turned to stone in her grief and misery. If any one wished to depict renunciation, a better model could not be found.

"You?" stammers Cilly. "How you look! Go to bed!"

"No," says Ditscha, "I shall stay with Achim

—always! Eh, Achim, always! *Two* shall not be unhappy!”

And the child, glowing with fever, stretches out his arms to her past his mother, whom he will not look at.

“Ditscha must stay with me!” he whimpers.

CHAPTER XV.

GRETA'S ACCOUNT IS SETTLED.

JOACHIM VON KRONEN sits in his study, the twilight of Christmas day descends, and the two letters lying open upon the writing-desk gleam dazzlingly white in the dim light.

The old man leans back in his chair, his hands folded, staring fixedly before him. Only a year ago Bertha had come, had stroked the hair back from his forehead, and said: "My dear, it is no use, the world will not stand still for our grief." To-day he sits alone, his wife rests in the vault, and his darling, the dear, active child, struggles with death.

During the past night the child had become worse, the physician pronounced that he had inflammation of the lungs, the little patient is unconscious, and suffers terribly. The fir-tree stands unadorned in one room, the playthings are not unpacked, the servants creep about on tiptoes. And he, Joachim, is to blame. Yes, he is, it is useless to try to deny it, he says to himself. He knows women, these weak creatures, whose heads are

turned at once by a bit of love-happiness or sorrow, so that they forget everything else. And he had three such women in the house, and to these three he had left the charge of the child, giving himself up to old recollections; then, of course, the most terrible thing befell him.

One, Mademoiselle, was sent off early this morning, and the other two, the mother and sister, have suddenly come to their senses now; they pray and weep and mourn, now, when perhaps it is too late, Joachim von Kronen is furious with pain and anxiety; woe to him who comes across his path to-day! The two letters there before him have added to his anger.

The charming Captain von Reeden, who begs the "esteemed brother-in-law of his betrothed" for an interview, as yesterday evening, owing to the excitement, several highly important points could not be discussed, has received a sufficiently sarcastic answer.

For the present, while the only son of his betrothed and of his, Joachim's, dead brother lies between life and death, he will have to endure this uncertainty. Joachim von Kronen will not have anything to say on the subject now; later there will be plenty of time for discussing it.

To the second letter the old man knows no reply to make. The affair is at an end—wholly at an end. Ditscha's engagement broken—Rothe re-

jected. She has given him back her word, he writes, and adds a few polite phrases: "Hopeless conflict, inconsolable for life." It sounds so tragic, so romantic, quite too much so.

Well, there is nothing to be done. A third suitor will hardly present himself for Ditscha. What has happened? Joachim does not know. Possibly the foolish creature could not rest until, with her overstrained conscientiousness, she confessed her former little folly, and perhaps, in her innocence, gave it a look which did not belong to it, which she herself never intended, and the conflict—the hopeless conflict—fine expression—is the result.

"A charming post—to be the head of a family; devil take the whole life if only the boy—the boy may be spared!" Anxiety for the child makes the old man spring up. He will go and gaze at the little face burning with fever, he cannot endure sitting here, alone under the weight of coming misfortune. He goes softly down the corridor, and turns toward the wing occupied by Cilly. The old house is as silent as though the death-angel had already entered it. On the stairs crouches a form; as the baron gazes at her she rises, a stylishly dressed woman in a large, feather-trimmed Rembrandt hat. She seems familiar, but he does not know who she is and pauses, thinking she is waiting for a servant to announce her. Finally, in the

fashionably dressed lady he recognizes the silly girl, Greta Busch.

She curtsies and begs the baron's pardon, she only wanted to see Miss Sophie.

At this moment Hannah comes and says, with scorn in every feature, "Miss von Kronen will not see you!"

The fat little person's eyes suddenly flash fire and flame. "Then kindly tell her that I shall go directly from here to Mr. Rothe, to tell him something," she cries maliciously. "I need not really allow myself to be treated like a beggar-maid, when before I was quite good enough to draw the chestnuts out of the fire for her, at that time when she—as she——"

"What do you mean?" asked the baron, returning, although he had apparently disappeared down the corridor of the left wing.

"Oh, Baron, I mean—I mean it is a sin and a shame for Miss von Kronen to treat me so bad when I always was ready to help her that time——"

"Come with me, my girl," says the baron very calmly, addressing her more familiarly than before, "this is not the place to discuss such things, and I am very much interested to know what you mean."

He seized the startled woman by the sleeve of her fur-bordered jacket, and without further re-

marks, drags her down the corridor to his room; there he closes the door after them both, sits down in his arm-chair, turns up the lamp, and asks: "What were you about to say, my girl?"

Greta, who has half lost her senses in her hatred and malice, resolves to risk a *coup*. Perhaps the old man will pay.

"Oh, it is only, Baron—do not be vexed, because Miss Ditscha promised us money if we were silent, my husband and I, and told nothing of the affair——"

"What affair?"

"Why, at that time—the affair with Mr. von Perthien—the baron knows——"

"It is news to me! What was it then?" he asks in the same calm voice, and his trembling fingers tap on the desk-top.

"Oh, my husband drove her and me to the station that time when she wanted to run off with Mr. von Perthien, and, whatever I am, I stuck to her through thick and thin, and always carried her notes, and helped her to see and speak with Mr. von Perthien; and now—now she sends me off, Miss Ditscha does, as though I was an old beggar-woman."

"So you always carried the letters?"

"Yes, Baron."

The old man's trembling fingers have, apparently absently, taken from the table a riding-whip with

which he is accustomed to discipline the dogs. Now he bends the lash, and asks :

“And so you want your reward for it, my girl?”

“Oh mercy, Baron, I don't ask a reward. I only think, and my husband thinks so too, a little bit of recognition might well be in place, and as we helped her once, Miss Ditscha might help us. A few hundred dollars is nothing to her, and what fault of mine is it that my husband gambled away the money she gave us?”

“So she has already given you money?”

“Yes, about six weeks ago. And we don't ask for very much this time, only enough to get to America, Baron; and when one is treated so badly, one gets mad; and as for my husband, he is not to be held,—he will go to Mr. Rothe, and he will know what to do.”

“I do not doubt that,” says the baron suddenly in a loud voice, and draws a step nearer to the person. “I do not doubt that! But why trouble him? I know too.”

The old face is deathly pale, as he now with lightning-like rapidity raises his whip. Straight across Greta's cheek falls the lash. “There, my girl,” says he, panting, “there you have your reward; and now go—go, I tell you, and do not venture to scream, or I will have you and your rascally husband arrested for blackmail and slander.”

Greta's piercing scream is silenced. With crimson face, on the left side of which a broad red weal now is visible, she stares at the old man, her fists clenched, incapable of uttering a word.

"Did you understand?" he thunders. "March! If you are not on the way to America by the next steamer that leaves Hamburg, I shall have you arrested. I shall send word to the police in Hamburg at once. Leave here immediately!"

"I will remember this!" hisses Greta Busch, and leaves the room.

The baron sinks heavily into his chair, throws the whip in a corner, and sits there as though crushed. "So that was it, *that*,—poor girl, poor Ditscha! And not a word did she say, fought it out alone, exposed herself to the greatest insults! Then it is no wonder that she rejected Rothe. And why? Because we let her wreck her life for want of love, of understanding—ah!——"

He had struck a woman, but he would have suffocated had he not done so. How dearly that blow would yet be paid for he did not think.

"Uncle," Ditscha whispered behind his chair an hour later, "Uncle!"

He starts and turns. "You, my poor girl?"

"Uncle," she sobs, "if only Achim is left us I am not poor. I will never grumble again, a new life shall dawn for me. I will think only of him,

care for him as long as I live; for myself I desire nothing more, nothing!"

"God will not will it, Ditscha," he murmurs, "he cannot take the boy from me; we *must* keep him." And he strokes her hand, she looks so wretchedly, so worn with watching, ten years older than she is.

"We will stay with you, Uncle," she leans her pale face against his cheek, "peacefully, we will all live together quietly, you, Achim, and I."

"Yes, my dear child," and he draws out his red silk handkerchief, and wipes away his tears.

"God will not will it otherwise!" he repeats.

CHAPTER XVI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

No, God did not will it; they kept him, and he has grown up under Ditscha's unwearied, loving care.

Ditscha has long since dropped her childish name, no one calls her by it now except the boy; for all others she is "Sophie" or "Miss von Kronen." If possible she has grown even taller, she has become a stately, beautiful woman, whose grave life of responsibility has given her a somewhat reserved, stern air. Only at one name do her lips quiver, her calm gaze darken; even to-day she cannot bear to hear Curt Rothe spoken of. But at another name she smiles, that of Joachim, Achim, her brother. Then her whole face brightens, then her eyes grow moist as now, when she reads aloud to feeble old Uncle Jo, whom gout has bound to a wheel-chair for years, a letter from her darling, who is visiting his mother in Dresden for the first time since he came of age.

“DRESDEN, May 3, 188—

“MY DITSCHA:—

“I have kept you waiting two days longer than usual, forgive me. A thousand times I have planned to write you, but you can imagine in what a state of commotion mamma’s home is, and in what a state of commotion such a Dresden apartment in the American quarter would always be. What a contrast to the quiet of our dear old Beetzen! Above me an Englishman practises the violin, below me an American plays the piano, then mamma wishes to drag me everywhere and exhibit me to her acquaintances.

“Ditscha, I cannot endure this for long. How different are these days from those that we passed together, you, Uncle and I, or we two alone, in our quiet Beetzen, which is so beautiful in spring; or down on the Riviera, or in Egypt, and a couple of times in the Black Forest, where you faithfully accompanied me in my search for strong lungs. Ditscha, how can I ever thank you for all your love? I am here with my mother—yes, she can claim the name—certainly, but do you know who is my true mother, my faithful, loving mother?

“I kiss your hands, my mother, and thank you for all that you have done for me. And that is much, Ditscha, much more than every one suspects. I see you shake your head, but it is so, Ditscha. Or do you think I do not know what you have given up in your own life for the sickly boy? How

many nights you have watched, how many tears shed, how much patience you had? It is true, Ditscha, and I can never repay you for it, even if I gave my life for you.

“And now do you wish to hear about mamma and my so-called papa? Papa has a touch of gout, and is quite as tiresome as ever, the list of promotions is still his favorite reading. Mamma is pretty, plump and rosy, likes to dress well and gayly, all kinds of gay ribbons and scarfs flutter about her; a little terrier trots briskly after her, his little silver bell ringing merrily on his collar, as she flits about the room. She still always mislays her keys, laughs as heartily as ever, and has a crowd of old and young admirers about her, whom her droll ways amuse greatly. But, Ditscha, I could not lead such a life, in which the whole object is to be amused.

“‘What have we on hand for to-day?’ is the first word at the breakfast-table. Papa thinks of whist or skat, mamma of the theatres, dinners, suppers, concerts, etc. What nerves such people have, Ditscha!

“The American’s piano drives me wild. I just interrupted my writing, went to mamma, and asked her: ‘How can you stand it?’ She laughed. She said if I were once to see Miss Perth I would not complain.

“‘Do you know her, mamma?’

“‘No, I only know that she is a beauty of the first water.’

"It may be that she is agreeable to look upon, this Miss Perth, but she is terrible to hear.

"To-morrow mamma gives an entertainment in my honor, a musical evening, followed by a supper and dance. I must submit of course, Ditscha, and I hear you say: 'One cannot always do only what one likes, my boy!' That is true, and I even delighted mamma with some new cotillon figures, for on the whole this is a very simply maintained household; my step-father sees to that, as he understands how to keep down expenses.

"How thankful I shall be, Ditscha, when my carriage stops in front of the steps of Beetzen, and I have you and the dear old house once more, never again to be separated from either. Tell dear Uncle I have not yet fallen in love, he must live a long time before he can see my future wife. For the present, I need give myself no trouble, my house is so well kept, eh, Ditscha? And liberty is so sweet at twenty-three. I have only just begun to live, now that I am sound like other men, and my lungs have quite recovered from the weakness caused by my childish prank that Christmas eve. We understand. And to whom do I owe it that I can live like other young men, dance, ride, wrestle? To my Mother Ditscha!

"Good-by for to-day. Console Uncle for my hard-headedness in the matter of matrimony; good-by, and kisses from
YOUR JOACHIM."

Ditscha looks much affected as she finishes, and quite crimson from the praise. The old man also

smiles. "His mother must not find him a wife," says he, "she must be no modern doll; but a whole-souled woman, the one he marries; like you, Sophie, like you. However, to please me, he might really be in earnest; I have not much longer, Sophie,—all are dead, all," he continues; "I am the only one, child, except Anna. I have outlived them all. And now there are only three of us here in Beetzen, Ditscha: you, the boy and I. He must not wait too long."

"But neither must he be precipitate; he is still a boy, Uncle."

"Boy? Our princes are no older when they marry."

"But love cannot be commanded, Uncle Jo."

"Oh, nonsense!" says he. "In my time it was different. I cannot say that I felt an overwhelming passion for Bertha. She was not pretty, but good, pleasant, and industrious; and what a wife she made, Ditscha, what a good wife! Such a uniform, quiet, continuing affection is the true thing. Your love of to-day—no! A little mishap, a slight unevenness in the way, and it is over—yes—hm——"

Sophie feels that he refers to her and Rothe; she rises and goes to the window. She crumples the letter in her hand, stares out into the spring evening for a while, then slowly leaves the room. She had intended to seek her own apartment, but in

the hall she turns and wanders out into the park. Here it was, *here* that she once bade him farewell. At that time it was winter, it snowed and stormed, but hot passion burned in her heart; to-day—ah heaven! to-day flowers bloom about her, and the winter is in her heart. All that she has suffered in life is caused by this recollection, and yet she would not be without it.

When she thinks what might have been if her youth had been well guarded and protected, if one thing had not happened—then a deep depression, a bitter mood comes over her, which even to-day, after so long a time, it requires weeks to conquer. Sometimes she does not think of it for a long while, until chance, a word, or some trifle from the days of her error or of her later brief happiness, carries her back, as though by magic, to the past, and causes her heavy hours.

Once Hannah declared that she had seen Mr. Rothe in church. Another time, about two years after they parted—the boy was still small—she saw his name as she read the newspaper. The blood rushed to her heart, her trembling hands could scarcely hold the paper. The announcement of an engagement: Rothe—*Franz* Rothe—ah, thank God—another!

All day long she felt the shock.

And then, no one knows of it, then one day she held in her hand a letter from his mother. The

old lady wrote so kindly, in such a motherly manner, and begged her to confide in her to tell her why she and Curt had parted.

“He does not speak of it, but he is so changed, he who used to be such a warm-hearted, sunny man. Now he lives on his other estate in East Prussia, almost on the Russian boundaries, where the foxes bid each other good-night, absolutely alone, scarcely writes, and passes his time in solitude and work, without a ray of sunlight. And the beautiful castle Dombock in the Mark country stands empty. How I long for Dombock——”

If Ditscha would only tell what happened. An old mother’s hands, patient and skilful too in untangling knots which seem impossible to undo, and also clever at tying together broken threads, would so gladly try their skill. Her dear daughter is surely quite as unhappy now as her Curt, and she, the mother, cannot sleep a night for her tears.

“What had happened then? There are no faults which love cannot pardon and overlook.” Poor Ditscha! Perhaps she has never shed such broken-hearted tears as over this letter, and for days she went about without answering it, and destroyed innumerable letters before she could finish one to send in reply.

She wrote that mother must forgive her, it was all her fault. But she could not speak of it, nor could they ever be brought together again. She

wished him all possible happiness, and she was calm now, and lived only for her brother, whom fate had given into her care; that this was more happiness than she had expected, and she would devote her whole life to him. She thanked mother many thousand times, and begged her to think mildly of her for all the future.

Since then she has heard nothing more of him, but it was long before happiness was hers. But at last peace has come upon her, making her quite happy, in so far as happiness can consist of work, self-denial, and absolute self-forgetfulness. She can now see the castle tower of Dombock without her heart beating more rapidly, and calmly hear that its master, that Rothe, is soon to return—a rumor which arises again and again in the neighborhood—to undertake the management of his estate himself. Among her dreams of the future is one that often returns, that of friendly intercourse between Dombock and Beetzen, the lovely dream of a friendship between Ditscha and Rothe, with melancholy but smiling reminiscences, a short, late happiness with unbounded respect on both sides. Surely they are old enough now to be friends, and he will think more leniently, their hearts are calmer, and a pale autumn sky hangs above their world.

But the boy shall have and enjoy all that was denied her, the dear little fellow; he has really

grown up finely, and Ditscha is quite proud of the result of her education. Grave, with a tendency to idealism, yet so noble, so above everything low and unworthy, so chivalrous, and with the kind, good heart of a child,—in a word, a noble fellow.

And once more she takes his letter from her pocket, then her eyes fall upon a postscript that she had overlooked previously.

“I have just made the acquaintance, at the riding-school, of Mrs. and Miss Perth. Ditscha, she is magnificent, I tell you; that is to say, the latter. I never believed any one could be so beautiful, and was fairly startled when I saw her. Do not let my enthusiasm startle you, it means nothing.”

Ditscha suddenly sighs. Ah no, this does not startle her, but the time will come when she must share the only person in this world who belongs to her with another; and how share it? She will be forced to put up with a tiny portion of his love.

She has thought a hundred times how it will one day be at Beetzen. That he, whose health needs all possible care, will choose no other calling than to cultivate the estate of his ancestors, is natural; the contract with the bailiff, which expires next year, will therefore not be renewed. He will occupy the wing of the manor formerly occupied by his mother; he does so already. The rooms will be sufficient when he marries. Ditscha will take Aunt Clementine’s room; to be sure, he will

not hear of it, but she will carry her point, for she would not like to be in the way, and from up there she can help and advise sufficiently, if they wish her advice; and from up there there is such a fine view of the country—as far even as Dombock.

Peace and mutual confidence shall always prevail in Beetzen Manor, and if God sends fresh blossoms to the old stem, they shall have a youth sunny and bright as a spring day, Ditscha has resolved. They shall not suffer from such memories as hers.

Now she smiles at the enthusiasm with which he writes of Miss Perth, and fancies what this young lady may say to the handsome, slender fellow. Ah, he will please her, the best *parti* in the Mark region. But that is all of no consequence. Miss Perth does not even come into consideration for a Von Kronen. And she goes upstairs and writes a long letter to her boy; then seeks Hannah, who has grown very stout, and sits in an easy-chair in her little room, darning socks for the boy. Of course, Hannah must hear the letter, or at least parts of it, even that about the beautiful Miss Perth.

“Oh, God forbid, Miss Sophie!” says the old woman, “that does not please me at all. I cannot bear all the Americans since Greta Busch went over there. All that is bad gets together there, I think about the Americans.”

Ditscha shakes her head and gazes at her amused.

"You may shake your head, Miss," says Hannah vexedly, "but I always have warnings and dreams, and last night I dreamed about a great wash and very dirty water, and when I do that it is always a sign of misfortune."

Ditscha taps the old woman's cheek.

"We will have no more misfortune," says she, "now only happiness can come, Hannah." She looks so radiant, actually young, in spite of her forty-one years.

"God grant it, but do not be too hopeful, Miss Ditscha," says the old woman deprecatingly, "misfortune never sleeps."

"Yes," says Ditscha, "I feel as though all trouble lies behind us, Hannah; and now do not frighten happiness away with your croaking, do you understand, you raven?"

"No one is happy before he is dead," persists Hannah, gazing after the handsome figure as Ditscha leaves the room with elastic gait. "She deserves to be happy to her very grave, but—God knows!"

Two weeks later, a letter comes from Dresden which contains much of little interest to Ditscha, for Miss Perth figures in it more than is to her taste. The young fellow has driven, ridden, and walked with the beautiful girl, has danced with

her at a garden party, and calls her a sweet creature. "If you could only see her, Ditscha!"

In her answer Ditscha merely alludes casually to Miss Perth, but she does mention her, for she cannot offend her darling. She will treat the affair quite objectively, although at heart she is slightly uneasy. Yet why should he not rave over a beautiful girl?

"Have you any message to send our boy?" she asks Uncle Jo, who sits shivering in his wraps in the warm May sunshine out on the terrace, gazing into space. Hannah, who occupies the post of a kind of nurse to him, sits at a respectful distance with her knitting.

"He must not wait too long," he murmurs, "or else I shall die unconsolated."

He is always the same. It seems as though the faint flicker of life derived nourishment only from the ardent hope that his race might not become extinct.

Hannah exchanges glances with her mistress. "I think he will come back soon," says the latter cheerfully, "and then he must seriously look about here for a wife."

"The Finkenbergs have seven girls," says he, turning his head toward Ditscha, "they must be coming on now; no beauties, but good, sensible and good. All honor to their mother, Ditscha, and the young fellows must

look at the mothers, the mothers, when they go a-courting."

"That is a true speech, baron," says Hannah.

In the dining-room Ditscha hastily adds a few more lines:

"Do not stay away too long, Joachim. Uncle is very feeble now; not that there is any immediate danger, but he is pining with longing for you. You know who is the sun for him and all Beetzen." Then she comes out again and sits on the terrace near the old baron and the old servant, and speaks in her gentle, pleasant way of what is dearest to the old man, of the time when the young baron will rule here in the manor.

"He must raise horses again," says Uncle Jo, "we used to have a fine stock here."

"And the cows of the bailiff they do not suit me at all, Baron; the new-fashioned Swiss cattle—they are not for us. We can't make Swiss cheese from their milk, for the fodder here is not the same as in the mountains."

"Old chatterbox!" grumbles Joachim von Kronen. "When there are any children to raise you can talk, but here be still."

"Yes, you are right, Baron," says the old woman, without the slightest trace of sensitiveness, and goes on knitting. The air is filled with fragrance, the trees and bushes are a bright green, the bells of the little church are

ringing for vespers, the sky is blue, without a cloud.

The next morning, quite early, Ditscha wanders, her basket of keys on her arm, through her boy's rooms. She has opened all the windows, for he may come soon, very soon, and she gazes happily at each piece of furniture, each picture. She pauses in his study, which now connects with the library by a door which has been broken through the wall. Over the writing-desk hangs Ditscha's portrait, a large photograph in a tasty frame. It shall always hang there, he has declared.

"No, of course it will not," Ditscha says to herself, "but whose will displace it?"

She stands in a deep revery, her hands clasped, the key-basket on her arm, when the maid brings her a letter.

"By special delivery?" she asks in astonishment.

"Yes, Miss!"

She looks in the basket for a pencil, and signs the receipt with trembling hand. For quite a while she then sits in the arm-chair, in one hand the letter, in the other the dainty knife with mosaic handle, which she has taken from the desk to open the letter with. It seems to her that an invisible hand restrains her. "Do not open it, misfortune lies within."

"Absurd," says she, "why should I be anxious?"

And she cuts open the envelope. There are only a few lines, written in such haste as to be almost illegible.

“DEAR DITSCHA :—

Come! See the girl I love! I am unable to write more, I must speak with you. If you take the ten o'clock train you can be in Dresden at six in the evening. Dear, darling Ditscha, come, make the measure of your kindness full.

“YOUR JOACHIM.

“P.S. I will meet you at the station.”

That is it, so soon! Ah, and he is still so young! She starts up and gazes about her. Is she dreaming? It seems to her that the sun no longer shines so brightly as before, that the air has grown thick and heavy as she breathes. An oppressive anxiety has suddenly overcome her.

Who is she? Whom has he chosen? She leaves the room with dragging feet, she will prepare for the journey, she must go. When and where would she not go at his call? The maid shall pack her trunk, she has no mind for it. Were he ill she could not be more bowed, distressed. Mechanically she makes preparations for her absence, and at breakfast she appears in her travelling costume, a gown of dark blue cheviot, and a little matronly *capote* with simple ribbon trimmings, suitable to her years, as she

expresses it, but which makes her appear almost young.

The old man stares at her in astonishment. "Are you going out, Sophie?" he asks, strangely affected.

"Uncle, I must leave you alone for a few days. I am going to the boy in Dresden, at ten o'clock," she says, as unconcernedly as possible.

"Is he ill?" he asks quickly, and the hand which holds his fork drops down.

"No, Uncle Jo; quite well, very well," she hastens to assure him.

"Ah, thank God!" he murmurs, raising his fork again.

Ditscha deliberates. Shall she tell the old man that Achim is about to bestow his heart, that he has already done so? She thinks he will be pleased; but just as she is about to speak the strange anxiety overcomes her again, and she is silent.

"We wish to admire some pictures together, Uncle," says she.

He nods.

"Do not stay long, child. Bring him back with you."

"Yes, Uncle."

An hour later, she drives to the railway station at Büchow. The sky is slightly overcast; a damp, warm vapor, like that of a greenhouse, rests

upon the landscape. "Hot weather, miss," says Franz the old coachman, except Hannah, the only old servant still at Beetzen. "I've often known springs like this; it makes one feel very good."

She has not long to wait in the new Büchow station; the express arrives, she takes her seat, sends good-by to the old baron once more, and away speeds the train. Toward evening, she scarcely knows how the day has passed; chiefly with lectures of prudence to herself, but in vain; she cannot shake off the feeling of anxiety.

A fine rain is falling as she arrives in Dresden, a fine, delightful, spring rain. In all the gardens bloom flowers, red, white, and lilac, and a sweet perfume comes in at the open window of the compartment. There is a crowd at the station. Ditscha gazes out of the window, then waves to a slender, strikingly handsome young man in a light suit of clothes; who in the next instant, his face somewhat pale, helps her out of the train, kisses her hand again and again, and can say nothing but, "I thank you, I thank you!"

Handbag and trunk are soon attended to; he offers his sister his arm—the hotel is quite near—and they walk across the wet square, under the umbrella which he holds carefully over her, to the hotel.

"You would not be able to endure living at

mamma's, Ditscha," says he. "Nor do they know anything about the whole affair; *first* I must speak with you."

Finally, they are in a pleasant room with windows looking out upon the garden, in which the rain has washed all the smoke and dust from the young leaves, so that they look as though they had unfolded in the purest forest air. It is a little drawing-room, with rococo furniture and a couple of comfortable arm-chairs; adjoining is the bedroom. On the round table is a huge bunch of violets, perfuming the whole room.

Ditscha, who has taken off hat and jacket, nods her thanks in the glass to the young man. He does not notice it, he sits staring out of the window, with one hand drumming on the inlaid table.

"And now confess, my dear boy," says she, coming to his side, and tapping his cheek affectionately; "what have you done, bad boy? Who is she? Where did you meet her?"

He takes her hands and presses them to his eyes: "You must be very tired," he murmurs.

"Not in the least, Joachim."

"But hungry?"

"Nor that. I could not eat until I have heard all; do not keep me in suspense. Tell me—who is she?"

She has seated herself near him on the sofa, rests her arms on the table, and gazes at him with

her large eyes which cannot hide her inward anxiety.

He does not answer.

"One of the young ladies whom you have met in your mother's house, I suppose?" she asks, as he still is silent.

He shakes his head violently, "No, Ditscha, no. It is Ellen Perth, the young American of whom I wrote you."

"Ellen Perth? And you—you love her?"

"Yes, Ditscha."

"And she returns your love?"

"Yes, I think so; no, I am sure of it."

"You have not yet spoken to her?"

"No, not spoken! But—I had promised you that you should see her before I did so."

"And you think you can be happy with her?"

"Why, Ditscha, how many questions you ask? Of course! And even if I did not think so, if I knew certainly that I should be absolutely unhappy, I—I could not give her up."

She starts. If it is so, why does he ask her first? He has a right to choose. How foolish of her to desire that he should first consult her, and how touchingly conscientious in him to keep this promise.

He has sprung up and paces the room.

"And her parents?"

He shrugs his shoulders, and draws his hand

over his forehead. "Her parents? I do not know, Ditscha; they live here, like many other Americans, in apparent luxury; they miss no concerts, no plays; give dinners, have a hired carriage, and Miss Ellen rides—I made her acquaintance at the riding school—dresses beautifully, plays, sings, is charming, beautiful—I know nothing more."

"Are they cultivated people?"

"The father seems to be, he has—good heavens! I do not know. The mother pleases me less; but I am very fastidious, Ditscha. When a man has always been with a woman like you, then—" he gives her a tender glance, and pats her arm.

"My dear boy, do not flatter me now, only tell me about the mother. So you do not like the mother?"

"Not in the least! She is the only one of the family unmistakably *parvenue*: she speaks impossible English, and even more impossible German; dresses like a variety actress, smells of patchouly a mile off; wears diamonds of immense size on the public streets—in a word, the mother is terrible."

"And in spite of this?"

"I am not marrying the mother, Ditscha," he says, forcing himself to jest.

"All in all, my darling, it seems to me no match for you," says Ditscha calmly.

"See Ellen first," he replies.

"Ah, my boy! I know that I cannot prevent

you; but you would never—a single common streak—the slightest ordinary habit in your wife—you could never endure it.”

“Ellen is a thorough lady, Ditscha.”

“I do not believe it,” she persists. “The air of a nursery must be very pure, very fine, Achim, to form a thorough lady. They do not thrive in an atmosphere of patchouly.”

“But we could train her,” says he softly. “You and I, Ditscha.” He clasps her hand, and gazes into her eyes pleadingly, ah, so pleadingly! She has never been able to resist this look.

“That is true, my dear; and if she truly loves you, she will learn.”

“Ditscha!” he says joyously.

She frowns. “Achim, I do not know whether she can love you as you should be loved.”

“Make her acquaintance, Ditscha.”

“Yes, of course; give me an opportunity.”

“Would you go to the opera with me for my sake, in spite of the fatigue of your journey?”

“Could I see her there?”

“Yes; I have taken a place for you in the box near them. I myself am in the parquet. You can see Ellen at short range.”

“But my dress! Still—yes, I can change it; I have a black silk gown with me. There is haste, eh? Ah, please order me a cup of tea quickly. I will be ready in ten minutes.”

She dresses in great haste in the next room, and comes back punctually as she has promised, in ten minutes; in a gown of black moire, which has no other recommendations than the handsomeness of the material, and the excellence of its fit.

Twenty minutes later, she finds herself in a first-tier box, and gazes at the audience. As it is a Wagner opera all the seats in the large house are occupied; only in the boxes are there vacancies, also in the box where Ditscha sits. She seeks Achim in the parquet, and exchanges a glance with him. She feels unspeakably sorry for him, the poor, foolish boy, who has lost his heart—Heaven knows to whom!

At this moment, the door of the next box opens; there is a rustle of silk, a strong odor of patchouly, and near Ditscha—only separated by the velvet-covered partition of the box—some one sinks down breathing heavily; a very stout woman, laced in to the utmost limit of endurance, with scarlet face, hair dyed bright golden and arranged in a thousand little curls, sparkling with diamonds, and clad in terra-cotta damask.

“Good heavens!” thinks Ditscha, horrified, “is that the mother?” Then she slowly turns her head.

Behind this lady’s chair stands a girl, gazing at the audience. Ditscha starts; now she can understand her darling’s unreasoning passion, now she

feels that she has lost him. Like a marble statue stands this lovely, slender, girlish figure, draped in snow-white silk; a head of true classic beauty rises from the graceful neck, the dark hair is fastened in a simple knot at the back of her head, short curls shade the dazzlingly white forehead, and what a sweet face! a pair of beautiful, pathetic dark eyes, a beauty of the most refined type. She gazes down into the parquet, and now her eyes brighten; slowly she raises her bouquet to her mouth, a grave little mouth, and touches her lips to it.

Ditscha reluctantly turns away her eyes, and looks at Achim; but he has no glance for her, his eyes rest, as though bewitched, on the beautiful girl.

So it is she, Ellen Perth!

Now she glides down the steps, and takes a chair beside her mother, with the bearing of a young queen. Fortunately, she does not perceive Ditscha's gaze. Ah! and Ditscha feels as though she must go out, seize Achim by the arm, and say to him: "Come, come to Beetzen, my poor boy; come and learn to forget."

There is a sudden silence. The overture begins. All listen, only Ditscha's stout neighbor cannot yet be quiet. She fans herself with a feather fan of huge dimensions, and finally asks the gentleman standing behind her, in a hoarse whisper, to give her her wrap, for she has "transpired" so much.

Ditscha could laugh if her tears were not so near. She sees and hears nothing of what is going on on the stage, she has eyes only for her neighbors.

When the curtain falls, madame asks in her oily voice: "Did you see Kronen, Ellen?"

The young lady nods.

"Then I suppose he will come here at the long intermission. Anyway, you will meet him in the lobby. I shall sit here; I don't like to walk. Greet him for me!" All this in English, in a terribly coarse voice accompanied by a laugh that shakes her whole huge body.

Miss Ellen acts as though she heard nothing; she and Joachim scarcely take their eyes from each other. Now the gentleman leans slightly forward and hands his wife a letter. Ditscha has a chance to see him. A very thin man, with sharp features, dyed mustache, his head almost bald; very elegantly dressed, quite aristocratic all in all. Ditscha has seen similar-looking men at Monte Carlo and Baden-Baden.

"The letter," says he, also in English, "was given to me by the postman when I went upstairs to get your opera-glass."

"Where is it from?" she asks.

"Why, you know, from Büchow——"

Ditscha thinks she cannot have heard rightly, and blames herself; what connection could these

Americans have with little, out-of-the-way Büchow?

"Can you read it?" asks the man.

"No," says she, "I have forgotten my lorgnette. Is it good news?"

"Quite good! The old man at Beetzen is only a walking corpse," says he, bending nearer to her.

"So, so!" says she.

"And the house is kept by—" he adds in a whisper.

Ditscha understands only the first.

"I can soon settle her," says madame, leaning comfortably back in her chair.

Ditscha's brain whirls, she would like to clasp her head in her hands. For heaven's sake! is she dreaming? She stares with fairly insulting curiosity at the excessively blonde, painted person near her, whose face is averted.

Is she delirious?

The second act begins. It seems scarcely possible to Ditscha to endure the music, inhale the perfume; a feeling of oppression, a foreboding of misfortune has come over her, so that it requires all her will-power to remain. Finally, the intermission comes. Ditscha remains seated; the beautiful girl in the next box rises and leaves it, accompanied by the gentleman whom she called papa. The stout lady remains, and gazes at the boxes, her opera-glasses at her eyes.

Ditscha waits with compressed lips and chalky face, her eyes fixed upon the woman. Finally, the latter lets her opera-glass sink, and glances indifferently at Ditscha. The puffy face suddenly pales beneath the paint; she half-closes, then opens her eyes wide; she has recognized Ditscha, and Ditscha her. Ditscha's icy expression proves it.

Mrs. Perth is Greta Busch!

Ditscha now rises and leaves the box; Mrs. Perth follows her, and at the box door they meet. The former Greta Busch has assumed her sweetest expression possible; she stands before Ditscha with outstretched hands.

"Oh, my dear Miss von Kronen, what a surprise!" she cries, in a tone of the greatest joy.

Ditscha apparently sees nothing before her, she merely draws aside and walks past her. Two ladies who have watched the little scene are greatly amused at the stout person, gasping convulsively for breath, and staring with a furious expression after the slender, aristocratic figure.

Ditscha has reached the *foyer*. In the crowd of chatting promenaders which fills it it is hard for her to find her brother. Suddenly she perceives him beside the beautiful girl; his face is radiant, he is talking eagerly to her. With difficulty she reaches his side, lays her hand on his shoulder, and says hoarsely: "Take me to my hotel, Joachim; I do not feel well."

A glance at her changed face proves that she speaks the truth. He is ready at once, confusedly takes leave of his beautiful companion, who gazes in surprise at the slender, distinguished-looking woman, and he anxiously asks after his sister's health.

Ditscha is deathly pale, but does not speak; not even in the carriage. "Shall I come upstairs with you?" he asks, as they get out in front of the hotel.

"Please," says she.

Upstairs, she throws off her wrap; and when the waiter has vanished after lighting the candles, she cries, stretching out both hands to her brother: "Joachim, come with me to Beetzen, this very night, I beg of you!"

There is such piteous anxiety in this cry that he takes her in his arms, and tries to calm her.

"Ditscha dear, what is it? For God's sake, why you are trembling!"

"You must not see her again," she cries, and her colorless lips quiver; "come with me."

He leads her to the sofa, pours out a glass of water, and then says:

"You know, Ditscha, how much I have always valued your advice, but this time you must at least explain to me *why* I must follow it thus implicitly."

"She is no wife for you," she gasps.

"Why not?"

"The family—the mother—Joachim, it is impossible, you cannot inflict that upon us—cannot wish to degrade your ancient name."

"Can we not discuss this more calmly?"

"No—no—it cannot be discussed!" she cries, beside herself. "Uncle would curse instead of bless you, believe me."

"Do you know this woman, then?" he asks suddenly, looking at her in surprise.

"Yes."

"Where did you ever see her, Ditscha?"

Now she grows ashy pale, and staggers toward a chair. "She is—she comes from Beetzen; she is the daughter of our former gardener, Busch."

"Ah, you have made a mistake." He laughs heartily. "Ditscha, you—you dear goose!"

"She is," says the sister, "we both recognized each other. She went to America with her husband and child years ago. You played with the daughter as a little boy; try and remember—she worked in our house, the mother."

He shakes his head, but cannot recall it. "Was her name Perth then?" he asks, still thinking that Ditscha is mistaken.

"No; how she came by that name I do not know."

Now he starts; Ellen Perth has told him that Mr. Perth is her step-father. He has sunk into a

chair, and gazes at the opposite wall; suddenly Ditscha falls on her knees before him.

"My dear boy," she pleads, and tears run down her cheeks, "I would give my life if I could make you happy, but I cannot save you from the necessity of forgetting this girl, however painful it may be to you. I would implore Uncle to forget her antecedents, but it is not only that—I cannot tell you, do not ask me—Uncle once drove this woman from his house with blows."

"Ditscha, get up," says he softly; "it needs no more words. I—I will come with you."

He is very calm, and very pale; he begins to pace up and down the room. She has never before seen him like this, so crushed, so despairing; but she knows the suffering he is undergoing, and which she cannot alleviate.

"Jo, my darling boy!" she whispers.

He only nods, and continues his pacing. Finally he pauses in front of her. "I must say good-by to mamma and pack my trunk. When does a train leave?"

"At one o'clock, Joachim."

"It is past ten now."

For a while he walks up and down the room again, then he says quickly: "I will finish it quickly, that is best. Mamma is not at home this evening; I will write a note to her, pack a few things, and be back here in time. It will be best

that they do not even learn that you have been here, Ditscha."

"Had you made any plans for this evening, Joachim?" she asks.

He stares at her.

"Yes," says he—then briefly: "I thought—I had intended to engage myself, nothing else."

"My God!" she stammers.

"I was invited to their house to-night, for the first time."

"To the Perths?"

"Yes."

"For heaven's sake, you surely will not go there, Joachim?"

He does not answer, he looks for his overcoat and cane. "I am not a coward, Ditscha," says he then, "and I will see her once more. Meanwhile, good-by!"

Ditscha feels as though she must restrain him by force; but there she stands in the middle of the room, her arms hanging limply, and gazes at the door behind which he has vanished, as though it could counsel her. Only now that she is alone does the terror of this meeting overcome her, reviving all her old recollections.

A waiter appears and brings a little supper. The gentleman had ordered it. She rushes into the next room, seats herself on the bed, and wrings her hands convulsively. If he only would return,

if he only sat beside her! When the rattle of plates and dishes has ceased, she returns to the other room, packs her things, and waits; she does not think of eating. Finally, there are steps outside, a hasty knock, then he enters.

She stares at him in surprise, he looks so fearfully changed, worn; his face reminds her of the look it used to wear in his childhood after severe illnesses. The eyes gaze at her so piercingly, as though in anxious question, as if he had never before seen his sister.

"You must go alone," says he, and before she can speak he continues: "I will come to-morrow, or day after to-morrow. I have something to attend to here yet—I cannot leave to-night——"

He seats himself at the table, still in his overcoat, and takes the napkin from his plate. "Will you not eat something, Ditscha?"

"No. Tell me why you will stay here?"

"But really—nothing! To see mamma again."

"You are deceiving me."

"I really have only to see mamma, but I have a headache; a night journey is disagreeable to me."

She seats herself on the sofa.

"Shall I wait until you can come with me?"

"No," says he shortly. He pours out wine for her, and passes her various dishes, still with the same peculiar look. Suddenly he seats himself

beside her on the sofa, puts his arm around her, and says: "Oh, Ditscha! Ditscha——"

"What is it, my dear boy!"

"Nothing!"

"Have you said farewell?"

"Yes, yes; do not ask me."

"But it pains, pains you sadly," she whispers, and strokes his hair.

"Do you know that too?" he asks aloud.

She glances at him in surprise. "Yes, Achim; I know it too. But one learns to be reconciled, dear."

"Very soon sometimes," says he in an undertone.

"Yes, you *men*!" says she in the same tone, forcing herself to laugh.

"You were always very good to me, Ditscha," he begins—then, quite abruptly: "I must repeat it to you once more this evening. You came here for my sake, kept me from unhappiness, and yet——"

"Do you realize that already?" she asks, relieved.

He hesitates a while. "I am forced to," he murmurs. "But now come, it is time!"

"What nonsense to compel me to take this night journey!" says she reproachfully.

"Oh, it is much better so, Ditscha; I do not want mamma to hear of the affair."

He wraps her in her travelling cloak, and escorts her to the railway station as attentively as he had

brought her to the hotel. And now he talks of all possible things, of matters which do not interest her at all. To-morrow there are races, perhaps he will go to them; in any case, day after to-morrow at the latest, he will be at Beetzen. Give his love to Uncle and old Hannah. "How did you find the performance to-night? Fine, was it not? We will spend a couple of weeks in a large city oftener next winter, Ditscha."

She walks up and down beside him in the station, where the gas-jets flicker in the damp, cold wind; it is decidedly chilly, and she feels that tears are very near her eyes. Finally, the train arrives. Ditscha gets into the train and leans out of the window, grasping the hand he holds out to her.

"Joachim, come soon!" says she, in a trembling voice.

"I hope so, Ditscha." Once more he stares at her so questioningly, then his old, charming smile comes over his pale face. "Thank you, Ditscha dear; a thousand thanks."

He still walks beside the train, her hand in his, until an official calls to him to come back. Only then does he pause, hat in hand, and looks after her, still smiling. As soon as the train is out of sight, he hurriedly puts on his hat, the smile has vanished, and he walks quickly from the station, through the streets, aimlessly. These last hours

have passed as though in an oppressive dream, and now consciousness seems gradually returning, although still under the influence of the dream.

How was it then?

Ditscha has been here, has seen Ellen at the opera, and declared that she recognized the mother, a former servant of the Kronens, whom Uncle Jo had driven from the house with blows. Frankly, he had doubted Ditscha's assertion, positive as she had been and implicitly as he usually believed her. Then he had left her for an hour and gone to the Perths; he must have certainty.

What had happened there he can scarcely realize; and yet it was so clear—so pitilessly clear.

Evidently the family had not long been back from the opera. He had had to wait a while alone in the drawing-room, with its rose-shaded lamps, and whose chief decoration consisted of a huge silk American flag, draped over an oil painting representing a view of New York with the statue of Liberty. For the rest, the usual furniture of an American apartment in Dresden; with hired furniture, hangings and rugs, in little taste; and without a trace of individuality, unless it were for the masses of flowers which Miss Ellen is so fond of.

After a few minutes she comes in, still in the white silk gown she had worn to the opera, and in the rosy light looking like a marble statue. She

comes to meet him somewhat more embarrassed than usual, but cordially holds out her hand.

"How nice of you," says she pleasantly, "to come to us in spite of your duties to your sister."

"You know that the lady is my sister?" he asks, with a tinge of surprise and distrust.

"I suspected it, you have so often told me about her. Will you not sit down?"

He seats himself opposite her. "Thank you, Miss Ellen, I have only come to bid you good-by, for to-night I go back to Beetzen with my sister; our old Uncle wishes my presence."

For a moment a deep blush rises to the young girl's beautiful face, her eyes look startled—only for a second; then she says mockingly:

"Summoned home? They are probably anxious about little brother."

He does not answer.

"How considerate and reverential the Germans are," she continues, "almost too much so, for no one here can live all his life full of absolute consideration for his dear relatives." There is a little frown between her brows, and with her white little teeth she bites off the petals of the Maybells she still holds in her hand.

She is terribly disappointed, she is so excited. Her mother had arrived home in a true fit of fury. What had happened she does not know, nor does she ask; she is so thoroughly American that what

excites the mother, whom she overlooks in every way, does not affect her for a moment. Still she is sufficiently German to have fallen quite sentimentally in love with the handsome fellow, to be very unhappy if she is not to live with him on his out-of-the-world estate, to think she will die if he leaves her.

A couple of tears suddenly sparkle in her eyes. He does not see them, he stares past her at the Stars and Stripes.

"And yet," she continues, in a low, gentle voice as he is silent, "it is really lovely in this country, where every breath tells one of the past—the glorious past. The whole atmosphere is so sweet, dreamy, even our old German governess in New York attracted me in the same way. Only think, baron; she had a porcelain jar on her bureau, containing dried flowers. When I begged her, she would lift off the cover, and then a delightful perfume would exhale—a bit of withered roses and lavender, a bit of dust, of mould—but it was all so mysterious, so impressive; and then she would say with grave face: 'Breathe that, Miss Ellen, that is German air!' Ah, I should like to stay in this country, and I know mamma wishes it too, but—then the people I love must be with me."

She can do no more to detain him, and he is still silent.

"When are you coming back, baron?" she asks, her voice now half-suffocated.

He glances at the charming girl, and seeks an answer. He is still seeking, when the rustle of a gown, and panting breathing, announce Mrs. Perth; behind her comes the head of the family.

"Baron Kronen has come to say good-by, mamma," says the unsuspecting young girl sadly.

Jo has sprung up. Mrs. Perth laughs a nervous, irritated laugh; Mr. Perth sinks into a rocking chair.

"When are you coming back?" repeats Ellen, and her eyes shine at him as though filled with tears. "We have not yet finished our lawn-tennis set."

"You must ask: 'When will your sister permit you to return, Mr. von Kronen?'" says Mrs. Perth, and laughs again.

"What do you know of my sister?" asks Von Kronen, in an irritated tone.

"Much!" says she maliciously. "Oh, very much."

Suddenly he has assumed his arrogant expression, takes his hat from a chair, and bows: "It is time that I leave you. I have the honor to wish the ladies good evening. Mr. Perth, good-by."

Greta Busch still stands in the same attitude, as though prepared for fight. She knows she has lost Ellen her lover, him whom she would have

most willingly given her in her silly arrogance, her efforts to humiliate Ditscha. In her opinion this hated sister has come twenty-four hours too soon; had the engagement once become an accomplished fact, it would have continued; that should have been her care as a mother.

"Much!" says she now again, loudly and shrilly enough to make it plain that she is perfectly justified in behaving as proudly as she does.

"Pray repeat that to me once more!" says Joachim von Kronen, very calmly. "I do not quite understand."

Greta Busch has already lost control of herself before the threatening eyes which blaze at her from the young man's deathly pale face.

"You prefer to be silent," says he, "but surely Mr. Perth can give an explanation,—eh, Mr. Perth?"

Mr. Perth stops rocking and looks up from the paper. "But, dear child," he cries reproachfully, "what are you saying? Baron, Mrs. Perth is very excited to-day, do not pay any attention to her words——"

"You, sir, are responsible for what is said in your house," persists the young man. "I appeal to you, what does madame mean by her peculiar words?"

"You have applied quite to the right party," now cries the angry woman, "quite to the right

party. No one can give you more accurate information concerning the lady in question than my husband."

"But, Gretchen," he cries violently, "I beg you, Baron—a childish affair—youthful folly—" He has risen from his comfortable chair and stands before Jo von Kronen. "Nothing of consequence, baron; ladies are such severe judges in certain matters, eh——"

"Continue!" says the young man imperiously.

"If you insist—but I do not know——"

"I do insist, yes!"

"Well—years ago I had the honor of being engaged to your sister—that is all."

"Ellen, go out!" cries madame. Ellen has already gone. "It is not all," she then adds; and now she says something, says it in dry, brief, scornful words, so that the young man staggers back and reaches out for support.

As though seeking assistance his eyes wander to the husband, but he shrugs his shoulders and makes a gesture as though to say: "You wished to hear it, sir!"

In Joachim's ears but the one word rings: "Eloped." "You are a liar, sir!" he cries, "a common liar!"

"He became my dear, second husband, after he was riding-master in our riding-school for eight years, in Chicago," declares Mrs. Perth. "Only

ask your sister about him—she knows him—Hans von Perthien.”

“You will hear from me, sir,” says Joachim von Kronen.

“I understand perfectly,” is the answer.

The next moment the young man finds himself on his way to the hotel to Ditscha. Then he goes to her room, his heart bleeding, his idol soiled, trodden in the dust, feeling wretched as he has never felt before in his life. It is not true, it cannot be true! He had not ventured to allude to it to her; he only stared at her—at Ditscha—his Ditscha—it is not possible—it is madness.

And now she is gone, and despair comes over him. Only early in the morning, in the faint spring dawn, does he return home.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LAST BLOW.

DITSCHA has arrived at Beetzen. From some station on the way she telegraphed for the carriage to be sent to meet her, and it is there. It is chilly and rainy, and they have sent the coupé which Achim had given his sister, that she need not have to do her shopping in Büchow in a half-open carriage; as formerly she had once caught a severe cold from this.

It is a little jewel of a carriage, lined with brown damask, with pocket for note-book, a charming little clock, a mirror, and patent signal for the coachman. "Far too fine for me," she had said, crimson with pleasure, and her brother had declared: "Ditscha, there is absolutely nothing that is too fine for you."

To-day she weeps that he who is so fond of giving her pleasure must suffer; that a strange chain of circumstances and relations should thus unhappily cross his first dream of love. Ah, it is fairly incomprehensible!

Arrived at the house, she learns that her old

Uncle is still sleeping. She goes to her room and asks Hannah to come to her, and while she changes her dress, the faithful old soul sits on the chair her mistress has pleasantly offered, and tells what has happened during Ditscha's brief absence.

"The master and I went to walk yesterday," she begins, clasping her hands as though relating a great misfortune.

"Ah?" says Ditscha absently, "in spite of the rain?"

"It did not rain a drop, miss. But I wish that it had rained cats and dogs, for then we would not have gone."

"Why then, Hannah?"

"Because our baron fainted."

"Why, Hannah!"

"Yes, that was not very pleasant, even if——"

"How did it happen? Pray speak!" cries Ditscha anxiously.

"About three o'clock we started from here, and it was seven in the evening when we came home, miss."

Ditscha stares at the old woman as though she doubted whether she were in her right mind.

"Yes, and that happened so. The baron insisted upon going to Dombock, and I said, says I: 'Baron, is not that too far for your constitution? for this spring air carries one away so,' but he would do it, and when he will one can say noth-

ing. So we went on, and when we came to the road that turns into Mr. Rothe's park, he said to me: 'Hannah, I feel so badly; Hannah, let us turn back.' And there he lay among the cushions of his chair like one dead. I don't lose my head easily, you know miss, but this time—I thought he was dead, stone dead, and as we were now close to the Dombock castle I screamed to Franz to go for help. Well—and then—" She paused. "Well then, they were good, and it happened that the master was at home, and took care of our poor old master. And he did so as if he were his own son, miss; and he carried the old man in his arms to the carriage, and drove over here with us, and then, carried him upstairs to his bed, and stayed here until the baron fell asleep, did Mr. Rothe."

And the old woman gazes anxiously at her mistress, as though trying to see the slightest sign of emotion that this news must call forth in the pale face. But Ditscha can control herself; she remains perfectly calm, and does not say a word, though every nerve quivers.

She sits on the lounge of her bedroom, and looks wretchedly ill and exhausted. Hannah rises, arranges some pillows behind her, and brings a soft afghan. "Lie down for a while, miss. Such a hasty journey is not for you. So, and now I will darken the room, and you must go to sleep. Then you will feel quite differently. There! and

when our young master is back here again, the baron will be better, and so will everything else."

It is tea-time when Ditscha comes downstairs. The familiar old sitting-room is filled with a gray, almost wintry twilight; Ditscha, who has awakened from a short, uneasy sleep, shows traces of the tears with which she had fallen asleep. The old baron in his chair, wrapped up in shawls and afghans, does not notice this at all. He seems scarcely to remember that Ditscha has been away.

"Joachim sends his love, Uncle," says she, "and in two days at the latest he will be here."

"Did you then—oh yes, was he well and happy? Does he come back an engaged man?"

"Not yet, Uncle, but there is time enough for that. Eh? How are you to-day?"

"Well, child, well; but yesterday—good heavens! I thought it was all up with me. Hannah has probably told you?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"And think, when we had fallen into our old ways after a fashion yesterday, we talked of all kinds of things; I lay on the sofa at Dombock, and let myself be waited on like a pasha. And I heard a quantity of news. The old mother is dead, and one sister dead; and he lived over there in East Prussia, not a neighbor for miles, and in winter quite snowed in, wolf hunts, and all kinds of little adventures on the border, a fine existence. Finally,

when the old lady was dying, she made him promise to come here again, if he does not sell the estate. Now he is here, it was a strange chance was it not, that I fell in with him thus? Hm! Oh, well, all must be forgotten now! I told him, too, of you, and said that you were cheerful, quite cheerful, and almost prettier than as a young girl; that you idolized the boy, and that I was devilish glad nothing had come of the old affair; yes, yes, for I could not endure life without you, eh, Ditscha?"

She was pouring tea, the cup rattled a little in her hand. "And does he really intend remaining here?" she asked softly.

"Who? Rothe? Yes, certainly; at least so I understood."

"Did you tell him that I was away from home?"

"Yes, I believe so—no, I am sure of it. You had gone to Dresden to see some pictures, I said—did you not tell me so?"

At this moment Mr. Rothe was announced, and before Ditscha could escape, which was her instant thought, he was in the room. Her arms have fallen at her sides; she stands, her face turned toward the window, white to the lips with wide-open eyes, her lips compressed convulsively; but in the next moment she has recovered herself, and with incomparable self-control holds out her hand to the man in whose beard white hairs already

shine, whose sunburned face is no longer the same; it is much changed by solitude and years of unhappiness.

"I hope you will appreciate, Miss von Kronen, that I intended no disturbance. Your uncle told me you—" he pauses and gazes at her—"how unchanged you are!" says he slowly, and she draws away her hand—"that you were away," he finishes his sentence, and turns to the old man. "How are you to-day, Baron?"

"Thank you, much better. Will you not sit down, Mr. Rothe?"

"No, I thank you. I only wanted to convince myself that you are well again, baron, and I see it, and also that you are in excellent care." He shakes the old man's hand and bows to Ditscha.

"I thank you for your kindness to Uncle," says she, holding out her hand.

He clasps it slightly in his. It is the same room in which they dreamed their youthful dream; the same pictures, the same furniture, the same clock ticks on the wall, only the people are no longer the same.

"You are happy?" he asks softly. "Your Uncle told me that you are, and you look so. I do not know whether I can tell you the same of myself. So all is well with you, Sophie? That makes me glad. Good-by!"

"When will you come again? Do come!" the old man calls after him.

He hesitates to reply.

"Please come again," says she also. "Uncle will be so very pleased; we are still very lonely here at Beetzen."

A silent bow and he is gone.

"He will not come again, Uncle," says she quietly. "Who likes to revive painful recollections?"

The next morning, after a sleepless night, she arranges Joachim's room herself; his favorite flowers, his favorite dishes all await him. He had once admired a little clock which she had inherited from a godmother—she stands it on his writing-desk, she puts on the gown he likes her to wear. Now she has a couple of hours before the first train from Dresden arrives in Büchow. She seats herself at her desk, and before her lies a book; she will, as she has always done, record in a few words the events of the past few days. She turns over the leaves already written, and becomes absorbed in the record, which is all of Joachim.

They are simple, brief notes, but what a world of love they breathe! There stands, for instance: "To-day, our little patient went out into the garden for the first time; I pushed his chair, he will not allow any one else to do it. How he enjoyed the budding trees!" A few years later she reads:

"To-day, my boy's tutor was dismissed, and I went with him to the city to see about his entering the gymnasium; it is necessary for him to be with companions of his own age. Up to this time I have been his comrade, now he has taken the first step away from me. He comes home every afternoon, often I shall go for him; our dinner hour is now changed to five in the afternoon" Later, she reads: "To-day, our Joachim passed his examinations."

She remembers this proud day so distinctly. Of course, she called for Achim, she waited for him in the parlor of the gymnasium principal's wife. It was in spring, true April weather, and Ditscha carried a bunch of wild flowers in her hand as the young fellow entered, his face beaming. "Passed!" said he, nothing more; and she cried for joy, and kissed him and smiled at the same time, he looked so strange and stately in his first frock-coat. Ah, and the drive home, Uncle Jo's delight, and Hannah's pride! And the little festive dinner, with the pastor, and the clerical gentleman's droll speech, the charming reply of the boy!

How time has flown!

She goes on turning the pages. Now come the years of their travels. Achim was in poor health, they are in the south. Short notices, "Palermo, Christmas, 1886. Jo and I are homesick for Beetzzen, for Uncle's quiet room, for Hannah's brown

cake, the snowy park at home; but it is beautiful here, very beautiful!

"Rome. Easter! Joachim and I went to mass in the Sistine chapel.

"Florence. Joachim is quite enthusiastic.

"Nice. Joachim met one of his gymnasium friends here, young Count Mangelsdorf. Good heavens, if I should have to experience this with Joachim! Achim came and took all the money we both had on hand; it was to pay the count's hotel bill, and furnish him with money for his travelling expenses, he had lost everything at cards. Uncle Jo would never have forgiven us if we had not made what he gave us do for the journey, so I supplied the deficiency from my own pocket; it was no trifling sum. But Joachim and I are one, and he said very truly that if a person can keep another from despair he should not look at a few thousand dollars. His is really a noble nature, and I told him that all I possess is at his disposal.

"Beetzen, May 1887. To-day, Achim is of age. God bless him!"

And now, to-day, when she expects him back from Dresden, she writes with trembling hand: "May, 1889. Achim has to struggle with the first sorrow of his life; if I could but take it from him, could but keep him from all pain! Were he only here, the poor, poor boy! I have seen Rothe

again. I was much calmer than I thought possible. My whole heart is with Achim, who now suffers as I once suffered. How many long, hard years must pass before one becomes calmer!"

She springs up, and asks if the horses have been harnessed yet. She sends the carriage to the railway station in Büchow much too soon. About one o'clock she can no longer stay in the house; she goes to meet him along the road—the carriage returns empty!

A mysterious, inexplicable anxiety overcomes her. If he has—suppose passion has overruled prudence—what if this love were stronger than his love for her, for his uncle, the proud past of his race! Good heavens! who knows why he has remained behind? Perhaps *she* has asked him to see her once more, and at this meeting has held him fast, has bewitched him with all the magic of her beauty.

Why had she left him; why, *why* had she not remained with him?

At dinner she cannot eat a morsel, restlessly she wanders through the house and garden. The terrible idea that she may yet lose the only one she possesses on earth, makes her physically ill. Ah, what misfortunes are caused by love! Uncle will not survive this, nor she either, and it would be the best thing for her that she should not, for she would no longer have a home. She

should have told him all immediately, perhaps then he would have followed her. But speech would have failed her, if she had been forced to confess to him, who idolized her as almost a saint, the story of her folly.

Yet if thereby she could save him she would do it, would write it to him.

About five o'clock a telegram comes for Ditscha. They look everywhere for her. Finally one of the maids finds her in her dead Aunt Clementine's room, standing by the window and gazing down the road through the telescope.

"A telegram, miss!"

"Ah, thank God!" cries she tearing open the envelope. The girl is about going downstairs, when Ditscha rushes after her. "The carriage!" she cries; "Quick, the carriage!" She is fairly wild with anxiety since she has read:

"Joachim very ill.

CILLY."

The old baron must know nothing of it, of course. Ditscha must find some pretext for her departure. He is still asleep. Hannah must tell him then, when he wakes, that Ditscha has been forced to return to Dresden, because an engagement is under discussion. "Do you hear, Hannah? And if anything dreadful should happen, then—" she hesitates—"then send for Mr. Rothe."

Ditscha drives away in a condition bordering on unconsciousness. Arrived at Dresden—it is one o'clock at night, but she has telegraphed Cilly—she finds Cilly's husband at the station. He is very polite, very grave, somewhat stiff, and looks highly aristocratic.

"What hotel do you wish to stop at?" he asks, taking her bag.

"Hotel? I wish to go to Joachim!" she fairly screams.

"He is not able to bear excitement, my dear Sophie," stammers Reeden. "A Sister of Charity is with him——"

She stands still in the centre of the waiting room.

"Almighty God," she begs, "do not torture me so—what is the matter with him?"

"I will explain to you at once, Sophie, but not *here*. If you wish, come to our house for the present."

Fifteen minutes later, Ditscha finds herself in Cilly's drawing-room, where a single gas-jet is burning, and which, filled with all the modern trifles that Cilly so loves, oppresses her terribly in her great anxiety. She has sunken down upon a chair, and stares at the man as he removes his overcoat and, while he draws off his gloves, begins pedantically in a low voice:

"The matter is thus, dear Sophie—he had a

duel; it turned out badly for him—he was shot through the lungs——”

“A duel?” she asks dully, grasping the arm of the chair, “with whom? Why? Pray explain!”

“It is a somewhat involved story, which is not quite clear to me, my dear Sophie. He challenged an American who lives here in the same house with us, a Mr. Perth. I think our poor boy fell in love with the daughter, as it seems, quite seriously. We thought nothing of it; Cilly even was highly amused at his attentiveness, without appearing to notice it. Who would have thought—hm—for—hm—we did not associate with them, people of quite unknown antecedents. Well, I believe he intended following your advice, dear Sophie, which certainly was the best, and withdrawing; then they became disagreeable, and madame was highly impertinent about you—you—my dear Sophie. Of course, Achim could not—hm—well, we had no suspicion. About two o’clock yesterday the old washerwoman, Mrs. Perth, came up here like a fury, demanded to see Cilly, lamented terribly, ascribed all the blame to you, declared she had known you formerly, and many other things. Since then, I regret to say, Cilly has been extremely irritated against you, dear Sophie, so that I think it more advisable for you not to come in her way. You must excuse her;

one cannot be too severe with a mother whose child is suffering."

During this speech Ditscha sits there, her face drawn with pain, her clasped hands pressed to her lips, as though to keep back a scream. Now she springs up. "Let me go to him—let me stay with him!"

At this moment the door opens, and Cilly, her face swollen from weeping, a loose morning gown thrown over her corpulent little figure, comes in. As she perceives Ditscha she turns, and is about to leave the room.

"Cilly!" cries the sister, "be merciful, let me go to him, tell me——"

"Never!" she cries, "for it is your fault—he is dying for *your* sake! It is a misfortune to have such an one as you in the family. I tell you so plainly in this hour!"

"Tell me, then, what have I done?" cries Ditscha.

"He challenged this man, this murderer, because—because he asserted that he had formerly stood in a certain relation to you, which unhappily is true; for the wretched creature is that Perthien with whom you once wished to run off—oh, do you think I do not know that story? Aunt Anna told me; she never could bear you since. And your brother—your brother is dying because of that!"

Suddenly Ditscha clutches her forehead in both

hands and laughs shortly, as though incredulous. "Perthien?" says she, her tongue thick. "Perthien?" Then she sinks to the floor.

The gray sister works over her; after a long fainting fit, she comes to herself.

"Must he die, sister?" she asks.

"He is very ill, but God's mercy is great," says she.

"Let me go to him, let me!" she begs. "We love each other so. Sister, I will only hold his hand——"

The nurse's kind face becomes embarrassed. "Oh, miss, you cannot," says she, "he must not be excited, he——"

"But let me sit outside the door, sister," she pleads, almost screaming. "You do not know what you do if you send me away—ah, you do not know——"

And Ditscha crouches outside the door for hours, all day, all night. Cilly hears the sobs in at the sick-bed where she watches with the nurse; she would like to send her away, but what can she do? she cannot drive the despairing woman away like a dog.

Days pass, days in which life and death fight for the victory. The pitying sister finally makes a bed up for Ditscha in an adjoining room, the maid brings her food and drink, such as it is. How matters are at home Ditscha does not even

think, she only cares that the old man shall learn nothing. She has telegraphed to Rothe to take care of him. That she is asking of the man who had loved her a great favor, such as one would only ask of some one very near and dear, she does not realize. Who thinks of such things in such moments?

Slowly, very slowly comes the first hopeful sign. Cilly, who has behaved as though all her life long she had been the most self-sacrificing mother, for the first time leaves the night watch to the nurse, and retires to her own bed-room. Sister Josepha, with the kind, dark eyes, who now sits beside the sick bed, at Ditscha's entreaty leaves the door between the two rooms ajar; Ditscha can see his bed, and her darling's pale, worn face. She sobs softly, she had not been able to suppress it; now she presses her handkerchief to her mouth, for the patient has turned his head.

"Who was that?" he asks faintly.

The nurse shakes her head.

"It is my sister," says he, "let her come in."

"No one is here," says the nurse.

"It is my sister, tell her to come in," he persists.

The nurse, who has no suspicion of the circumstances, comes out. "Be very calm, miss; for God's sake, do not cry!" she whispers.

And Ditscha totters to his bed. She scarcely looks like herself, grief and anxiety have so changed

her. She stoops down, is about to kiss him, only his hand which rests on the coverlet; she dares not sob, but tears slowly run down her careworn cheeks. He hastily waves her away, and his eyes gaze into hers with a strange, cold glance which she does not yet understand.

"Is it true?" he asks.

"What then, my dear boy?" she whispers, half suffocated with tears.

"What they said downstairs, and that mamma confirmed?"

She stares at him, cut to the very heart.

"I shall become calmer if you tell me that they lie, Ditscha."

"Baron!" admonishes the sister, alarmed.

"Only say 'yes' or 'no,'" he demands excitedly.

Ditscha does not answer. She makes a gesture, raises her arms slightly, and lets them fall again; this gesture of assent seems to express utter collapse.

"So it is true?" he says.

She does not move.

Then he turns his head away, and is silent.

"Achim!" she whispers hoarsely.

He does not move.

The sister clasps her around the waist and tries to lead her out of the room.

"Achim," she groans aloud, "say that I may stay with you—for God's sake!"

No answer.

"Achim!" she cries again.

The sister now drags her across the threshold by main force, and lets her sink upon a chair. "Pray calm yourself," she says. "Sick people are so peculiar."

But Ditscha knows him better, she knows that he despises her.

When Cilly passes through Ditscha's room the next morning she is surprised not to see her. She asks for her. The sister on duty now has not seen her, nor the waitress, but the chambermaid says Miss von Kronen went out early in the morning.

Late in the evening a hack brings Ditscha to Beetzen. The servant who opens the door for her starts as though at sight of a ghost. She does not say a word, staggers upstairs, and disappears into her own room. The maid and Hannah, whom the man informs, hurry up; they find their mistress on her knees on the floor, like one desperate.

"I only stumbled over the rug," says she, and tries to rise.

"For God's sake!" screams Hannah, as she sees the fearfully altered face. "Miss Ditscha, how you look! Something dreadful has happened—our young master is dead?"

"No," says Ditscha, "he lives—but I, Hannah, I am——"

And the faithful old soul holds her unconscious mistress in her arms.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOO LATE.

It is a day in the latter part of September, unusually warm, almost sultry, as the young Baron von Kronen returns to Beetzen from the various baths where he has sought, and finally fully recovered, his health.

Mamma Cilly has faithfully accompanied him everywhere; he was so depressed that she could not possibly let him travel alone. And besides, Wiesbaden and Blankenberghe are places she has long desired to visit, and it had indeed been delightful there. She wrote one enthusiastic letter after another to her husband—her husband who had been forced to content himself with Teplitz, as he could not visit such expensive places, and did not like to allow his step-son to pay his expenses. With Cilly that was a different matter.

Mr. von Reeden has become a pedant, who thinks everything of honor, good tone, and absolute propriety; but has quite forgotten that, as a young lieutenant, he did something worse than steal silver spoons, since he robbed his superior officer of his wife's heart. To be sure the wife was quite

willing that her heart, no longer her own property, should be stolen; but still it was a theft, even if there were extenuating circumstances. He thought no more of this, absolutely had forgotten it. There are people who have the enviable gift of forgetting unpleasant things.

During all the time that followed the day Ditscha disappeared from Dresden without bidding farewell, Cilly had not once spoken of her to Achim. In the first place, it might excite him; in the second place, she had long been jealous of Ditscha. She, Cilly, was the mother, and really possessed the first claim to his filial love, which Ditscha had quite monopolized; she had been vexed enough at the adoration the boy had had for his sister—*had had*, for that is over now, since he learned the story of her elopement. It was the same old story: men permit themselves all kinds of little deviations, but the women of their station may not do so; and if, nevertheless, one does, she surely will not escape unpunished, as was plainly shown in this case again.

How was it now with Ditscha? She is a lonely, neglected old maid; whose second suitor had withdrawn when he learned of the scandal; whom even her brother had dropped now, and did not even correspond with her. When she had nursed her old Uncle to death she would be alone, and have nothing but the remorse for her folly. And be-

sides, Ditscha's dominion is as good as over if it is true that an unhappy love-affair merely precedes a happier one. This is proven in Joachim's case; in whose pocket-book, beside the charming photograph of young Countess Volbrathen, is a lock of her blonde hair; and Cilly thinks that she will not make such a bad young mother-in-law.

The train is just rolling into the station; Cilly gathers up the bags and gazes out of the window at the platform.

"I am curious to see whether Ditscha will come to meet us," says she over her shoulder. She must really mention her some time.

Joachim's face is gloomy and very pale. He cannot pardon her yet, he dreads the meeting and life under the same roof with her.

"I see no one but the footman," says Cilly, dropping her long-handled lorgnette.

The train stops, they get out and go to the carriage. The heavy luggage will be taken to Beetzen by the bailiff, so they can drive off without delay. Neither one notices that the eyelids of old Franz on his box are red from tears.

Joachim is taciturn. Cilly says: "Do you think it nice of her not to come to meet you? What is to come of it if the situation is to be strained in advance? You have really done enough for her, Achim, in letting yourself be shot half to death for her folly."

He does not answer, and gazes silently out at the landscape.

"It will not storm before to-night," remarks Cilly, after a pause, "but it is in the air already and affects one's nerves. I am fearfully uneasy."

As the carriage drives up, Hannah appears in the doorway. Hannah, with a remarkably pale face, and bowed as though she had grown ten years older since spring.

"The baron asked to be excused, he has just lain down for a little nap," says she, but it sounds as though the words would scarcely leave her throat.

Joachim's face is, if possible, paler than before; he does not say a word; merely nods, and glances about him as though he missed something.

The sitting-room looks remarkably desolate and neglected, dust everywhere on the furniture, and not a fresh flower in a single vase usually filled with them. Cilly can no longer conceal her displeasure. "Good heavens!" she cries, "it is very strange. The young baron comes back in health, after a long illness, and no one appears to greet him. Where is Miss von Kronen? Probably not at home?"

"Oh, ma'am," says Hannah—she stands in her dark gown in the middle of the room, and her hands hastily search in her pocket for a handkerchief—"she is in the house indeed—but—the pastor"—motioning toward the clergyman who just

then enters the room—"can tell you better than I." Then she puts the handkerchief to her eyes and turns away.

It is no longer the old, white-haired man with whom the baron played whist when Ditscha was still a young girl; he is a grave man in the forties, who had confirmed Achim, and was greatly esteemed in Beetzen Manor. He turns first to the young baron, but can scarcely speak.

"Baron, you return home at a sad hour," he begins. "The Lord has visited this house heavily. This morning at six o'clock the angel of death entered, and——"

"Almighty God!" cries Cilly. "Uncle! how is it then that so suddenly——"

"Not the baron," continues the clergyman, "the old, heavily afflicted man has had to experience this other grief, that he has lost the faithful stay and prop of his old age. His niece, your sister, baron, departed this life early this morning, after a long illness."

There is a long pause, only old Hannah's sobs are heard. Then Cilly goes to Joachim, who suddenly staggers, and looks so strangely changed. The pastor also puts an arm about him to support him. Hannah comes with a glass of water; the tears now run unchecked over her good old face.

"Yes, Baron, now all our sunshine has vanished," says she; the last word sounds like a cry.

Joachim cannot speak. Now he hastily shakes off the clergyman, and goes to the door.

"Baron," cries Hannah, "do not go to the old gentleman, he is fairly crushed with grief."

He pauses. "Why," he asks, in a half suffocated voice, "why did not some one write me that she was ill?"

"Oh, Baron, she would not let us," says Hannah, and clasps her hands over her wet handkerchief; "you must not be worried about her, she always said you were ill yourself. And until three days ago, when she got the news that you were coming home again, she was up, although she could scarcely drag herself about, and Mr. Rothe always had to carry her up and down stairs when she wanted to go to her uncle."

"Mr. Rothe?" asks Cilly, who sits trembling in a chair.

"Yes, ma'am; he nursed her and took care of her, because no one else asked after her: and she fell asleep in his arms this morning, and gave him her last message for her brother."

Joachim now hurries from the room, and goes upstairs. It is so strangely silent in the almost dark hall and corridors. He feels as though he had suddenly become an old man, as though a burden weighed upon his shoulders, bowing him almost to the ground.

Ditscha's rooms are unlocked, the windows are

wide open, now and then a flash of lightning illumines them. A couple of candles flicker on a table, around which a swarm of gnats float in a death-dance. The door of the bedroom is wide open, within there is a faint glow of candlelight.

Suddenly, Joachim cannot summon courage to cross this threshold; he leans against the frame of the doorway, his strength seems to have left him. How still, how fearfully still is that motionless, slumbering form over there on the bed, with the crossed hands on her breast! With the white face to which the flickering light of the candles seems to lend life. Then the heavy perfume of fading roses, which lie in masses on the sheet that covers her!

A mad pain seizes him.

"Ditscha!" he cries in agony, and rushing forward sinks down beside the bed. "Ditscha, forgive me, I did not mean it so!" and he bursts into sobs that shake his whole frame.

At the other side of the bed, the silent man cannot weep. He has sat there ever since she closed her eyes, and her hand grew cold in his. He has laid her head down and closed her eyes, he knows how dearly she has loved him——

All, all she had told him, her whole life, her struggle for love, her mistake, her happiness with him, her grief—and the last, the hardest—the loss of Joachim's love; him to whom she had given her whole life.

He tried to comfort her, spoke of a future which should yet make all good——

“No, no—I am—I have no more strength to be happy,—I am tired,” had been her answer.

Her last words, lisped like a weary child as she fell asleep, was the question uttered so many thousand times in these weeks: “Is there no letter for me from Joachim? Greet him for me—I love him very dearly—I love you all so dearly, and yet have only caused you pain!”

Hannah comes softly in, and lays her hand on the young baron’s shoulder.

“Get up, Baron, the master wishes to see you, and Miss Anna is there now—come!”

And as he fairly clings to the bed, she nods: “Yes, yes—that is all too late now.”

“Come, Baron,” says now too Rothe, and raises the young man. “Hannah is right; *our* tears, *our* remorse come too late. She pardoned you and pardoned me. If one can say of any human being she was of a pure heart, one can say it of her. You may think of her with pride and honor.”

And he leads him from the room, down to the bowed old man’s wheel-chair, beside which stand Cilly and Aunt Anna.

Ditscha is left alone—but that no longer pains her.

THE END.

✓
THE AUTHORS' LIBRARY
(COPYRIGHT)

Four of the Latest and Best Stories by
FLORENCE WARDEN

Author of "The House on the Marsh," etc.

Over Two Million Copies of Miss Warden's Works have been sold

A Terrible Family

This is a most readable and engrossing story. One of Miss Warden's happiest conceptions. The interest is almost dramatic in its intensity.—*New York Tribune*.

Adela's Ordeal

It is a story of very powerful interest.—*Home Journal*.

A Perfect Fool

A sensational love story of the best type.

A Sensational Case

A remarkably strong tale both in plot and character study.

The Secret of a Letter

By GERTRUDE WARDEN

The Gray Wolf's Daughter

By GERTRUDE WARDEN

With an added freshness and charm of style Miss Gertrude Warden lacks little of the vigor and ingenuity of her talented sister.—*Publishers' Circular*.

The International News Company,
83 and 85 Duane Street, New York

THE AUTHORS' LIBRARY

(COPYRIGHT)

Four Choice Selections from the Most Popular
German Novelists.

Translated by ELISE LATHROP.

Beetzen Manor

By W. HEIMBURG

Author of "A Maiden's Choice," "Gertrude's Marriage," etc.

No German writer of fiction has won a more merited approval of the American public than the author of "Beetzen Manor."

Translated by MARY STUART SMITH.

Clear the Track

From the German of E. WERNER

This is a very strong story of labor and socialistic incidents, well told and admirably translated.—*Boston Times.*

The Pearl

From the German of MARIE BERNHARD

Cleverly written and keeps up very satisfactorily the high level of "The Authors' Library."—*Charleston News and Courier.*

For My Own Sake

From the German of MARIE BERNHARD

Author of "A Household Idol," "The Rector of St. Luke's," etc.

The "Boston Herald" says:

This is another pretty story from the German of Marie Bernhard. The romance is full of pretty conceits, and is from beginning to end a thoroughly wholesome and pleasing picture of youth, love, happiness, and social gayeties.

The International News Company,

83 and 85 Duane Street, New York.

THE AUTHORS' LIBRARY

(COPYRIGHT)

Four Gems from the Best English Fiction Writers.

A Blameless Woman

By JOHN STRANGE WINTER

The author writes: "I regard 'A Blameless Woman' as the literary effort of my life."

Harum Scarum

(The Story of a Wild Girl.) By ESME STUART

Seldom have we read a more thoroughly enjoyable novel.
(*Publisher's circular.*)

A Tug of War

By MRS. HUNGERFORD ("The Duchess")

"The Duchess" never fails to please. This is one of her best.

The Surrender of Margaret Bellarmine

By ADELINE SARGEANT

Author of "Under False Pretences," "No Saint," "The Luck of the House," "A True Friend," "A Life Sentence," "The Great Mill St. Mystery," etc.

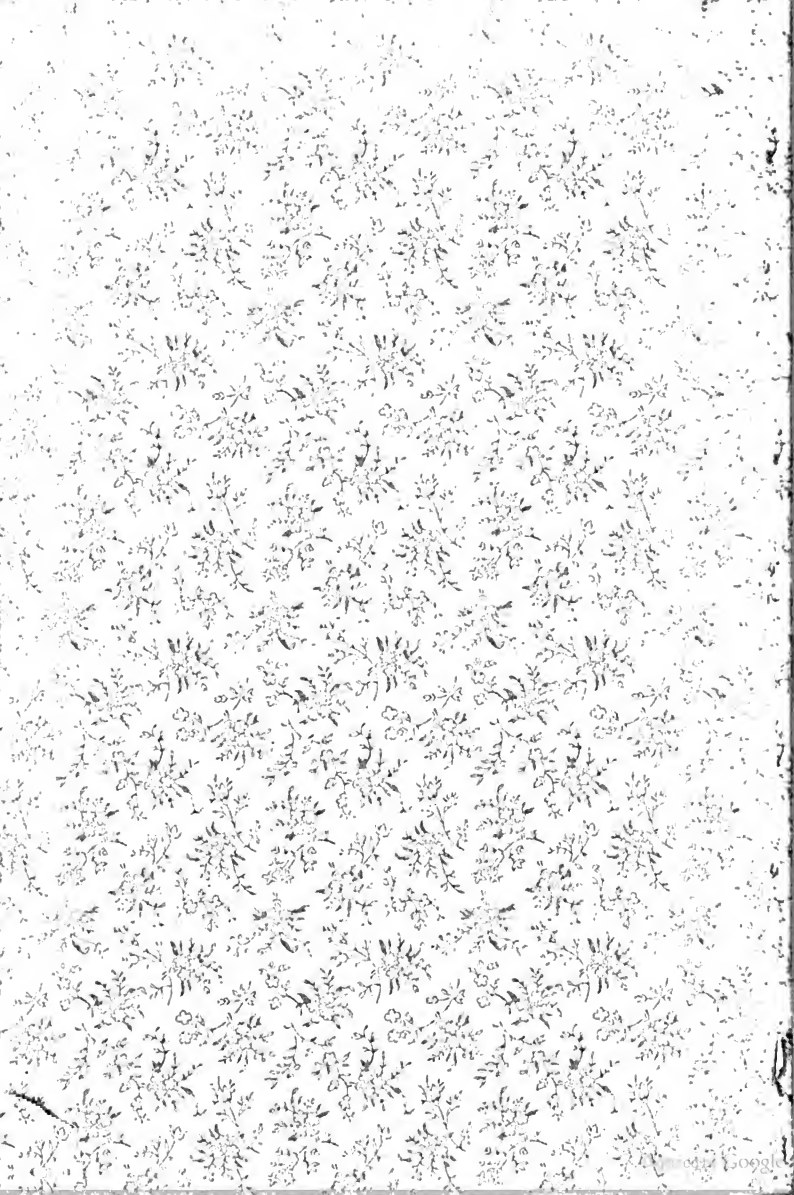
The "Surrender of Margaret Bellarmine" deals with the problem which arises when a woman finds the man with whom she is in love, and whose love she has won, to have been false previously to another woman. It is handled wisely and well, and the story is told with both pathos and spirit.—*Congregationalist*.

Well elaborated and charmingly written.—*Boston Times*.

It goes as one rather bright drop in the voluminous stream of English fiction.—*Brooklyn Eagle*.

The International News Company,

83 and 85 Duane Street, New York.



RX 000 436 192

